



INSIDE

**MERCEDES**

HOW THE TEAM THAT ONCE RULED F1 HAS BLOWN IT – AGAIN!

**FERNANDO ALONSO**

Why the double champ thinks he can win big with Aston Martin

**GAME ON!**

Ferrari's push  
to pass a  
Red Bull  
in crisis

**SECRET  
SERVICE**  
INSIDE THE  
FIA'S HIDDEN  
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# CONTENTS

JUNE 2024

## SECTOR 1

**4 IGNITION**  
Lando shows that Max is beatable

**6 PARADES**  
The best of Lando Norris's Miami win

**16 F1 INSIDER**  
Newey to leave Red Bull; Sanchez to Alpine; Steiner sues Haas

**22 F1 ANALYST**  
Getting new talent on to the grid

**24 UNDER THE HOOD**  
F1's degrees of flexibility



## SECTOR 3

**88 SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
Check out our latest subs offer

**90 REPORTS**  
From the Chinese and Miami GPs

**98 PREVIEWS**  
Of the Emilia Romagna, Monaco and Canadian GPs

**104 PRODUCTS**  
Reviews of the best F1 gear

**106 FLAT CHAT**  
Sauber/Audi plays it safe with Hülkenberg



## SECTOR 2

**36 FERRARI'S FIGHTBACK**  
Is the Scuderia ready to challenge or is it just another false dawn?

**46 IN CONVERSATION WITH...**  
Ferrari's Frédéric Vasseur

**48 MERCEDES IN A MESS**  
F1's once-dominant team looks set for another bad season

**56 FERNANDO ALONSO**  
Why F1's elder statesman chose to extend his Aston contract

**60 10 THINGS I LOVE**  
With RB reserve Liam Lawson

**62 NOW THAT WAS A CAR**  
The Cooper T53, the car Jack Brabham used for his second title

**70 RECORD TAKERS**  
A look at one of the FIA's valuable document archives

**74 A RACE WEEKEND WITH...**  
Haas team manager Peter Crolla

**80 ALTERNATIVE VIEW**  
Jody Scheckter's cars for sale

**82 SHOWCASE**  
Spotlight on Fernando Alonso

## F1 PRO

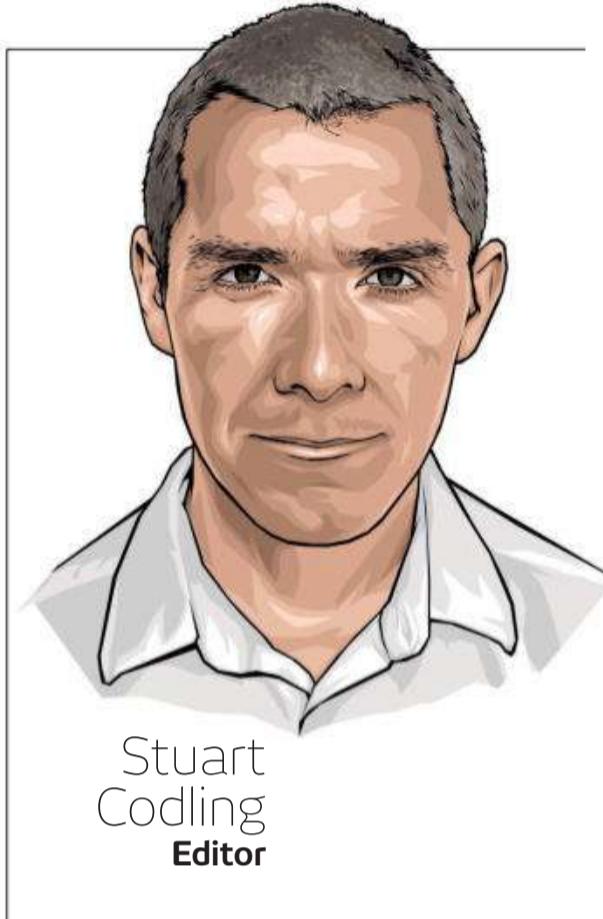
**29 STRAIGHT TALK**  
Why did Formula 1 owner Liberty Media decide to buy MotoGP?

**30 PRO PROFILE**  
Chris Gowland, MD of SMG

**32 MONEY AND McLAREN**  
How McLaren managed to turn its ailing finances around

# IGNITION

JUNE 2024



Stuart  
Codling  
Editor

## Contributors



### ANDREW BENSON

BBC Sport's F1 correspondent investigates whether or not Scuderia Ferrari has actually improved since last year (p36)



### ALEX KALINAUKAS

Autosport's Grand Prix editor tries to discover how Mercedes managed to get its F1 challenger wrong for the third season running (p48)



### DAMIEN SMITH

Damien delves into the history books to give us the lowdown on the Cooper T53, the car Jack Brabham used to win a second world title (p62)



### OLEG KARPOV

Oleg details what a race weekend entails for Haas team manager Peter Crolla (p74) and took a trip to one of the FIA's archives (p70)



## Max should check his cone-tract

**Never mind the bollards.** Whether or not you believe Lando Norris won the Miami Grand Prix as a result of Red Bull making a rare mistake on car setup (Max Verstappen's view), Max incurring considerable floor damage by taking out a bollard at the chicane on lap 22 (the Red Bull team boss's view), the Safety Car briefly picking up Max rather than Lando (toxic fandom's view), or indeed Donald Trump taking a short break from falling asleep and breaking wind in court to act as a "lucky charm" in the McLaren garage (Donald J Trump's view), F1's trip to Florida delivered ample proof that, given the right circumstances, Red Bull and Max can be beaten.

A race in which uncertainty prevailed all the way through the order, rather than in the wake of a runaway leader, was exactly what Formula 1 needed after several months in which the off-track machinations offered considerably more by way of intrigue than the matters arising between lights-out and the chequered flag.

Whether this state of affairs continues depends very much on what Ferrari and McLaren bring to the table in the coming months. In Miami, McLaren applied its first substantial upgrade package of the year to Norris's car. Throughout the grand prix Norris demonstrated that he had the pace to challenge Verstappen, even without the assistance of floor damage and a conveniently timed Safety Car. How much of this came through performance unlocked through car upgrades is difficult to

tell on a rear-limited outlier circuit where tyre management is even more crucial than usual.

The true trajectory of McLaren's development arc will become evident in the races to come. Ferrari also has a significant update coming but, at the time of writing, its ETA is uncertain... and on previous form, its effectiveness may be open to question.

As Andrew Benson writes in our cover feature this month (see p36), Ferrari has made great strides under Frédéric Vasseur's leadership, beginning this season second-fastest to Red Bull. The question now is where it goes from here. Vasseur says the improvement is largely a result of developing a culture of accepting that greater rewards arrive from taking bigger risks, and being comfortable with pursuing that course.

In the short run Red Bull still has the best driver in the fastest car – which means, all other factors being equal, it will continue to dominate. But some factors are more equal than others. As tech talisman Adrian Newey transfers to the RB17 billionaires' toy project prior to leaving, Red Bull is quietly scrabbling to prevent an exodus of other top personnel. 2024's titles may be well on their way to being settled but, if the brain drain continues, 2025 (let alone 2026) could be a different matter.

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## Lando reaches for the stars

I've been photographing Lando Norris since he was McLaren's test driver and it was wonderful to be on the grid after he pulled up following his well-deserved first grand prix victory. The team photographer gets to be there as well as the FOM cameramen so it's a privileged position. You might have seen me scurrying around with my camera in the background of the TV images...

We've known Lando has the ability to win grands prix – there was that opportunity in Russia that went begging – and he's a well-liked character, so naturally everybody was as delighted as he when he got this over the line. He absolutely deserves it and there are many more to come.



### Photographer

Steven Tee

**Where** Miami, USA

**When** 5:38pm, Sunday

5 May 2024

**Details** Canon EOS R3  
24-70mm lens, 1/1000th @ F5.6





## Victory in the paddock lottery

This being McLaren's first grand prix win since Monza in 2021, and the hugely popular Lando Norris's first time on top of an F1 podium, there was a lot to celebrate afterwards. Thus the team's post-race celebration shot outside its hospitality unit in the Hard Rock Stadium turned into something of a ruckus, particularly among the photographers, who were scrummaging like they were capturing the aftermath of a world championship.

In these circumstances getting a shot is a bit of a lottery since you can't move, but I like this angle of Lando kissing the (by now slightly dirty) trophy. It feels very authentic rather than posed.



**Photographer**  
Zak Mauger

**Where** Miami, USA

**When** 6:28pm, Sunday

5 May 2024

**Details** Canon EOS R3  
24-70mm lens, 1/1000th @ F2.8





MONSTER

## A different kind of orange army

At European races we're used to seeing Max Verstappen's 'orange army' out in force supporting their favourite driver. Miami was a bit more dilute in terms of fan allegiances but there was certainly a lot of orange, albeit a slightly different shade, as the papaya-clad team celebrated its first GP win since 2021.

As the closing laps of the grand prix panned out it was clear Max wasn't going to catch Lando Norris without a Safety Car, so I positioned myself opposite the McLaren pitwall to capture the reaction as Lando took the win. Obviously there are now health and safety guidelines about team personnel climbing the fence but they gave it their best shot within the rules!



**Photographer**  
Sam Bloxham

**Where** Miami, USA

**When** 5:34pm, Sunday

5 May 2024

**Details** Canon EOS R5  
16mm lens, 1/2000th @ F6.3









## Everybody goes (crowd)surfing USA

We photographers have kind of forgotten just how joyful drivers can be when they win a grand prix. The big run of Red Bull victories has probably done it. No matter how pleased Max Verstappen might be (although, when I get home and watch it back on TV, the post-race radio traffic is always a bit routine. “Well managed, Max,” etc), when you’re winning week-in, week-out, it must be like being a stage magician trying to feign surprise as he pulls a rabbit out of a hat for the 200th time.

There’s a great team spirit in McLaren at the moment and the first thing Lando wanted to do once he got out of the car was to go and find the guys. And he literally just launched himself into them – you can see how happy they all are.



**Photographer**  
Steven Tee

**Where** Miami, USA  
**When** 5:40pm, Sunday  
5 May 2024

**Details** Canon EOS R3  
24-70mm lens, 1/500th @ F6





## McLaren has turned a corner

Having been in and around the McLaren garage for many years as the team's photographer, I really got the feeling the team has turned a corner in terms of race setup. The cars were strong over the weekend and particularly on Sunday as Lando drove a smartly controlled race.

This picture is taken at the exit of the hairpin at the end of the back straight. Street circuits are tricky to navigate for photographers but they bring rewards if you look for them.

I shot this through a very small hole in the fence – by keeping the camera still and using a very fast shutter speed, you can pick up the car on motor drive as it goes through. Then one frame will be the perfect one, and this is it. I just like the angle of the car.



**Photographer**  
Steven Tee

**Where** Miami, USA  
**When** 5:14pm, Sunday  
5 May 2024

**Details** Canon EOS R3  
16-35mm lens, 1/8000th @ F6.3



PICTURES: ALEXANDER TRENTZ, MARK SUTTON

## A SCRAMBLE FOR NEWEY – AND WHAT NOW FOR MAX?

**Newey has finally decided to leave Red Bull Racing after joining the team in 2006. His next move has everyone in F1 guessing...**

regard Newey's departure as just a blip.

News of the legendary designer's impending departure follows a turbulent few months for Red Bull Racing amidst the controversy surrounding Christian Horner – and some believe the two matters are inextricably linked. Newey is said to be upset at being associated with the whole saga surrounding allegations against Red Bull's team principal. He is also known to be irked by Horner's attitude towards Newey himself.

According to several sources Newey chafed at Horner's comments in an interview with *GP Racing*'s sister publication *Motorsport.com* in which he singled out technical director Pierre Waché for praise, stating the team was no longer "dependent on Adrian". Newey's wife Amanda called it "a load of hogwash" on social media.

If Max Verstappen's father is to be believed, Red Bull Racing is on the verge of "falling apart".

"For internal peace, it is important that key people stay

01

**In years to come, when racing historians mull the reasons for Red Bull Racing's era of dominance in Formula 1 coming to an end, Adrian Newey's departure from the team may well be regarded as the pivotal moment. Especially if he is followed in the direction of the exit by other key personnel – in particular Max Verstappen. And yet, equally, posterity could come to**

02

## SANCHEZ TO ENSTONE

McLaren refugee joins Alpine

03

## GUENTHER GOES TO COURT

on board,” Jos warned from the pages of *De Telegraaf*, the newspaper he often uses to outline his stance. “That is not the case now. Newey is leaving and earlier this year it also looked like Helmut [Marko, Red Bull’s sporting advisor] would be sent away. For the future that is not good.”

Even if Verstappen Sr seems in no doubt it is primarily Horner who is responsible for Newey’s departure, Adrian insisted that he had been thinking about it “for a little while”.

“Formula 1 is all-consuming and I’ve been at it for a long time now,” he told *Sky Sports*. “2021 was a really busy year because of the tight battle with Mercedes through the championship, and at the same time putting all the research and development into the RB18 which is the father of this generation of cars. I don’t know, there comes a point where I just felt, as Forrest Gump said, ‘I’m feeling a little bit tired.’”

In a statement released by the team’s press department announcing Newey’s imminent departure, both Adrian himself and Horner referred to each other as “friends”.

Not everyone believes this is a friendly split, however. “That’s probably the first domino to fall,” opined McLaren CEO Zak Brown, who added that he is seeing “an increase in CVs coming our way” from Red Bull staff. However, it’s understood that the Milton Keynes outfit is currently in the process of re-signing personnel on more favourable terms. Waché, who signed a new contract last year, reportedly agreed an ‘upgrade’ in February which will keep him at Red Bull until at least 2028. Many believe it is the Frenchman who is now the mastermind behind the team’s successes; Max is one of his biggest admirers.

Max’s reaction to Newey’s exit was eagerly awaited in the paddock since he has stressed over the past few months that for him it’s “really important that we keep the key team together”.

In the end, however, there was a stark contrast between how Max and Jos reacted to this news.

“Adrian was incredibly important for the success that Red Bull had but over time his role has changed a bit,” Max said.



**Newey inspects the Ferrari SF-24 on the grid in Miami. A move to the Scuderia, where he could finally link up with Lewis Hamilton, could be tempting**

“I also really trust that the technical team that we have outside of Adrian is very strong and they’ve basically shown that for the past few years with how competitive the car is. So from the outside it looks very dramatic but, if you actually know what is happening inside the team, it’s not as dramatic as it seems.”

Rumours of Max’s possible move to Mercedes as early as 2025 – on a deal said to be worth €150m per year – have lost traction, including from Verstappen himself.

“At the end of the day, even if let’s say that would be the case, €150 million,” he said,

“money is not going to be the differentiator for me. I’m happy with what I’m earning already. It’s about performance. Everyone knows that. Toto also knows that.”

Since Mercedes is currently the fourth-fastest team in F1, this can be interpreted as a clear “no” – at least for the foreseeable future.

As for Newey’s future, it’s not yet clear whether he will continue in F1 at all. Red Bull agreed to let him go “in the first quarter of 2025”, meaning he could theoretically help another team develop a new car under the new regulations that come into force in 2026. Insiders confirm he has already held meetings with Ferrari team boss Frédéric Vasseur as well as Lawrence Stroll, who reportedly made an “astronomical” offer to join Aston Martin even before Newey’s departure from Red Bull was officially announced. Williams team principal James Vowles also revealed he has had “light discussions” with Newey about a possible comeback to the Grove outfit.

However, despite the celebrations in the Italian press over the prospect of Ferrari-bound Lewis Hamilton finally getting to drive a Newey car in anger, it appears the man himself has yet to make up his mind.

“Mandy – my wife – and the dogs, we’ll probably go travelling,” Newey said. “Get a motorhome and go down through France and just enjoy life. Then maybe at some point, I’ll be standing in the shower and saying, ‘Right, this is going to be the next adventure.’ Right now there is no plan.”

## SANCHEZ SWIMS AGAINST THE TIDE

02

Since mid-summer last year, Alpine's staffing news has predominantly concerned resignations and dismissals. In July the team decided to part ways with former boss Otmar Szafnauer and sporting director Alan Permane. Then, at the beginning of this year, the technical department lost two key leaders in technical director Matt Harman and aerodynamicist Dirk de Beer. This was followed by the news of Bob Bell's departure. The renowned engineer, who had held a consultancy role at Alpine, immediately joined Aston Martin.

Now, finally, Team Enstone can boast of a new appointment: David Sanchez has joined Alpine as the new executive technical director.

In a way, Alpine has been the beneficiary of McLaren's recent successes. According to the official line from Woking, the new structure of the technical department, established by team principal Andrea Stella, immediately proved its efficiency – and the intentions behind the recruitment of Sanchez, who signed a contract in February 2023 but couldn't start work until the beginning of 2024, no longer applied.

The French engineer, who had joined McLaren from Ferrari, appeared to be overqualified for the role he was handed at Woking. Sanchez was in charge of one of the three branches of the technical department, responsible for "car concept and performance", but in the end he only stayed with the team for three months.

"We had conversations with David about this topic and we realised and acknowledged that his level of seniority, expertise, competence is potentially even more senior than the role that he was having at McLaren," explained Stella.

In parting ways with Sanchez, McLaren did not put him on extended gardening leave, as is customary in F1 – and this



**Since dispensing with Szafnauer (below) Alpine has seen more senior management leave but Sanchez (above) has now joined the team**



presented the struggling Alpine with a perfect opportunity to lure one of the most respected engineers on the market.

Sanchez takes up a position that has effectively been created for him. A month earlier, when announcing the departure of Harman and de Beer, Alpine revealed a new McLaren-inspired structure with three technical chiefs: Ciaron Pilbeam of performance, Joe Burnell of engineering, and David Wheater of aerodynamics. Now they will all report to Sanchez.

The signing of Sanchez can be seen as the first major coup for Alpine boss Bruno Famin, who has been under pressure owing to the team's poor results this season. According to Famin, however, the team's current struggles are a consequence of the actions of his predecessors.

"The car we have now is the result of previous management," he stressed in an interview with F1's official website. This statement surprised many, including former Alpine boss Szafnauer, who insisted that most of the work on the 2024 car was done after his departure.

"Almost everybody works on the current car up until the [summer] break," he said during an event to promote his new EventR app. "After the break, everyone switches to next year's car. So you start your model changes and you're starting to do different experiments that don't necessarily apply to this year's car. It's what happened at Renault [Alpine]. Alan [Permane] and I left in July, and after we left is when they started on the next car."

Sanchez has plenty of time to influence the 2025 project and, more importantly, to start work on the 2026 car, as the regulations change. ►

## NEWS IN BRIEF... NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...

### HESKETH



THE 50TH anniversary of Hesketh's first F1 victory, the 1974 International Trophy, was celebrated at Silverstone on 20 April. The event reunited members of the legendary team, including Lord Hesketh and Anthony 'Bubbles' Horsley (pictured), and saw a demo run of the 308 in which James Hunt scored that historic win.

### ANDRETTI

The Andretti bid to enter F1, blocked by Formula One Management, has taken another turn. A dozen members of the US Congress have written to F1 owner Liberty Media asking why the bid was rejected, while also raising concerns over anti-trust legality.

### DRIVER

Mercedes protégé Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who is currently racing in Formula 2, has had his first two tastes of F1 machinery. His maiden test, in a 2021 W12, was a two-day affair on 16-17 April at the Red Bull Ring. Conditions over the two days were variable but the young

Italian managed to complete over 500km across the test. This was then followed by a secret two-day test at Imola on 29-30 April, using the team's 2022 ground-effect W13 machine.





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## STEINER'S NEW STAR POWER REVEALED

03



**Last year** the idea of Guenther Steiner suing the Haas F1 team would have seemed like one from a parallel universe. But now it's reality.

The former team boss is currently involved in several projects, from a punditry role for the RTL TV channel to an ambassadorship with the Miami GP, lucrative personal appearances and another book. He's demanding compensation from Haas, including for the use of his own image.

In court papers filed in Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Steiner claims his former team has failed to pay him commissions owed to him over several years, in a breach of his employment agreement. The filing states: "Haas F1 chose not to renew Mr Steiner's Employment Agreement. This was its right. But Haas F1 has done what it has no right to do and refused to pay Mr Steiner [amount redacted] owed under his Employment Agreement. But after years of accepting the benefits of Mr Steiner's reputation, experience, and deep connections within the sport, Haas F1 cannot withhold from Mr Steiner the benefits he has earned."

The lawsuit filings emphasise that the team has benefitted from Steiner's image. Its argument runs that Steiner's profile, elevated through his appearances in Netflix's *Drive to Survive* series, put more of a spotlight on Haas than the outfit's actual results might otherwise warrant.

"Haas F1 was frequently featured in the series, and Mr Steiner's presence in the show drove more and more fans to Haas F1," it said. "This exposure was extremely valuable to the team, particularly as it looked for additional revenue streams."

Steiner's lawyers also allege that Haas continues to sell merchandise associated with the image of the former boss – without the legal grounds to do so.

"Haas F1 has no right to use Mr Steiner's name, image, and likeness or to exploit them in any form of media after the termination of his employment," the filing says. "Haas F1 has not compensated Mr Steiner for its unauthorized use of his name, image, and likeness."

The team itself has refrained from commenting.

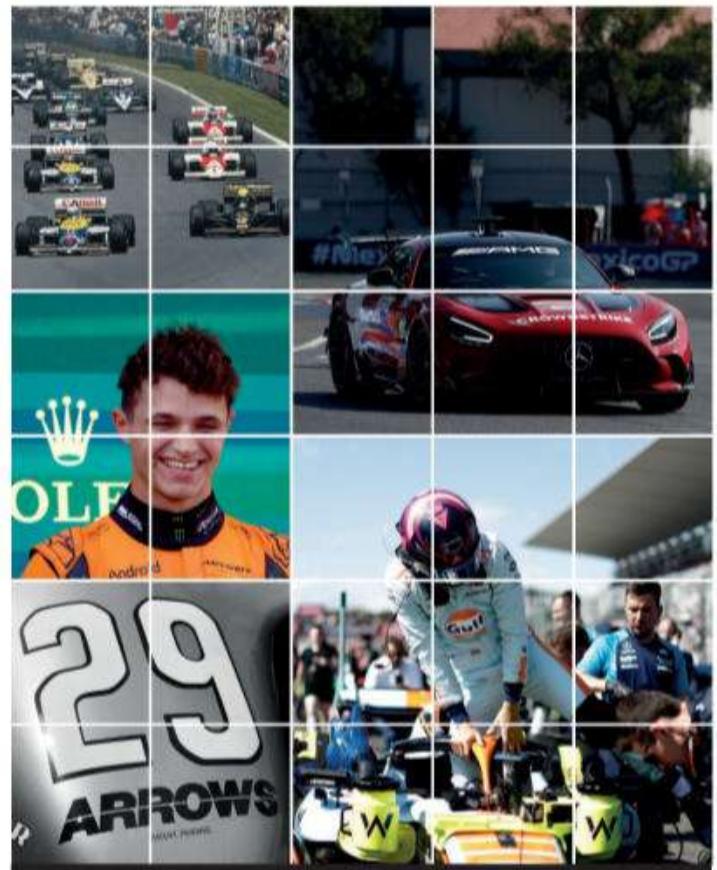
**Steiner is still very visible in F1 as a pundit and through his work with the Miami GP, but is now at odds with his old team**

### THE LAWSUIT FILINGS EMPHASISE THAT THE TEAM HAS BENEFITTED FROM STEINER'S IMAGE

## F1 MASTERMIND

Your chosen specialised subject: the world's greatest motorsport

- Q1** Charles Leclerc's most recent GP win for Ferrari was which race?
- Q2** What is Red Bull's lowest-ever finishing position in the constructors' standings and in which years?
- Q3** In 2023 how many GPs did not feature a full Safety Car period: 6, 7 or 8?
- Q4** Lando Norris has only claimed two of his 16 podiums starting outside the top six. Which two GPs are they?
- Q5** True or false: Nigel Mansell's 17 wins from pole position were all achieved in a Williams?
- Q6** Who am I? I started 109 GPs from 1994 to 2002 for Lotus, Tyrrell, Arrows, BAR, Ferrari, Sauber and Toyota, claiming two podiums.
- Q7** Lewis Hamilton failed to make a GP podium in the first five races of 2024 and which other season?
- Q8** Name the last two circuits to have held F1 tests with more than a single team present, when they were not on the GP calendar for that season?
- Q9** Three drivers led a GP for Arrows for a total of 127 laps. Who were they?
- Q10** Which was the last GP that Alex Albon started from a lower position than his team-mate?



1 2022 Austrian GP 2 Sevenhuijsen (2005, 2006, 2008) 3 8 4 Emilia Romagna 2021 and Qatar 2023 5 Felipe (Portugal) 1990 was in a Ferrari 6 Mika Salo 7 2009 8 Paul Ricard (2016) and Jerez (2015) 9 Riccardo Parise, Derek Warwick, Damon Hill 10 2022 Brazilian GP

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<b>A</b>	BAS 835	BRA 7T	CEH 795Y	DEM 953Y	ELS 16W	GAR 1H	HAL 58N	764 HPA	JAN 35S	737 JMB	<b>K</b>	KUR 26	MAL 338W	NBN 50	A972 PAT	<b>R</b>	P22 RTS	N504 BYA	
53 AA	BAS 477	BRA 17T	CEH 785Y	P733 DEP	SEL 50N	GAR 1X	HAL 350V	5555 HR	JAO 4L	JMB 733Y	<b>K</b>	KV 4505	C54 MAL	96 NCG	S121 PAT	<b>R</b>	743 RTW	S10 AMS	
487 AAA	YBA 73S	BRA 550K	8888 CF	D111 ERY	ELW 15Y	G4 ROT	D114 NDS	H47 SEN	JAP 17N	JMR 702	<b>K</b>	KV 2156	MAP 55S	6553 ND	A709 PAT	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
592 AAE	8 ATY	ABW 824D	208 CFC	DES 1N	ELY 823C	GAR 189L	H417 SEN	HSH 934Y	JAR 35Y	JMW 693	<b>K</b>	KAB 354N	2591 KW	MAP 408	86 ND	PAU 144R	<b>R</b>	6524 R	RUB 3R
AAW 333	730 BAX	BRD 996	C974 CFG	6044 DF	ELY 107T	GAR 501N	HAN 120W	HSH 995Y	JAR 450N	4407 JN	<b>K</b>	KAJ 58N	M425 HAL	W576 NDA	PAV 62J	<b>R</b>	5587	ARU 8Y	
AAB 855	BAZ 668	B22 EAD	C986 CFG	8422 DF	5411 EM	GAR 1D	J114 NDS	HSH 997Y	JAR 120N	JN 377S	<b>K</b>	KAL 550N	MRR 10W	NDD 958	PAW 903	<b>R</b>	1924 RA	RUB 83R	
ABB 364M	BAZ 1657	BRE 70Y	CFM 120W	9074 DF	3333 EM	T6 ASK	HAN 444B	222 HT	JAR 50N	597 JNW	<b>K</b>	KAR 317V	84 KYD	MAR 647E	NDV 506F	<b>R</b>	897 RAE	RUG 580Y	
B741 ABH	BAZ 996	B21 EAD	CG 4844	2986 DF	EMA 65K	TPI 4S	T114 NDS	76 HUA	JAR 60N	JOA 14N	<b>K</b>	KAR 12Y	KYL 13S	MAR 19W	6887 NE	<b>R</b>	RAE 785G	RUG 504	
ABH 488C	BAZ 993	BRE 51N	7777 CG	46 DFC	EMA 53X	GAT 3N	114 NDS	HUB 42D	J45 ONB	JOA 17P	<b>K</b>	KAR 317P	KYL 38K	MAR 63P	4571 NE	<b>R</b>	9498 R	Y935 ONY	
AB24 GAL	BAZ 933	BRE 14D	CG 3478	360 DFH	EMA 635S	GAV 117S	HAP 3N	HUG 637T	NJA 50N	JDB 50N	<b>K</b>	KAL 583	KWA 83	M425 HAL	PAU 144R	<b>R</b>	6524 R	RUB 3R	
804 BK	BBC 929B	BRE 35Y	CHA 210T	DFW 99	EMH 4	GBA 69	H22 LOW	HUG 35N	JAS 500N	JOB 8S	<b>K</b>	KAS 839	M425 HAL	W576 NDA	PAV 62J	<b>R</b>	5587	ARU 8Y	
24 BLE	BBH 799P	BRE 77T	RCH 33M	DGW 428B	ENH 147D	GBR 499	HAR 19Y	HUI 19	JAV 51W	KAS 160	<b>K</b>	KAS 160	MRR 10W	NDD 958	PAW 903	<b>R</b>	1924 RA	RUB 83R	
ABO 77T	BBH 712P	BRE 78Y	RCH 34M	DH 9336	ENN 73	GCN 254	GHA 770N	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 842	801 L	MAS 537	NDV 506F	<b>R</b>	897 RAE	RUG 580Y	
AB07 TTT	BBK 589M	GBR 199S	CHN 430B	DHK 499	ENR 38	GDE 444W	VHA 121S	HUM 33R	JAW 472	JOG 3R	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377E	MAS 6Y	NEJ 37R	<b>R</b>	RAE 785G	RUG 504	
477 ABU	BBK 69	EBR 199S	CHO 74L	D34 BLO	90 ENR	1111 GE	HAR 87S	HUN 71N	LOJ 4X	JON 135W	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
ABW 810D	BBM 628	GBR 166S	C11 OKA	DIL 6646	ENY 4S	GE 1414	KHH 778N	HUN 71N	A199 JAY	JON 53N	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
8169 AC	BBF 199S	CHR 930	DJI 7757	ERG 73	2222 GE	HAT 83T	HUP 1N	JAZ 59	JON 1K	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
ACC 994A	BBF 199S	CHR 930	CHU 88Y	DJO 946R	999 ES	GEE 5H	HAT 83T	HUR 57T	JB 370	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
LAC 70N	BBF 82 CJ	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
KAC 70N	BDK 85	MB21 DGE	CIL 6575	947 DK	EST 116D	GEJ 20	GHA 770N	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
ACC 70N	B9D BDL	GB21 DGE	C12 RON	3333 DL	E551 TON	GEN 77S	KHH 776N	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
ACU 447L	R178 EAL	BB21 GHT	796 CKA	77 DMR	1306 ET	166 ERY	HAR 53Y	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
ADV 661X	R98 EAL	BB21 GHT	37 CKA	6462 DN	ETA 18	GER 1A	HAW 50N	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
ADY 110D	B834 VER	BB21 GHT	CKE 188	DN 3754	ETH 313V	G8 4FR	HAY 733V	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y	
X21 AEC	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
AES 195T	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
AEW 994A	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
AFW 950A	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
G454 AFW	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
Y831 ONY	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
302 AWF	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
AFW 982A	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
AGU 35T	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
AGW 59N	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
B648 AH	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
212 AHW	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
754 AHW	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
S851 AJL	BB21 GHT	C22 DER	4859 DK	ESE 536	GEF 340V	H4 TAC	HUM 813S	JAW 31V	92 JOF	<b>K</b>	KAS 136	LAB 377	MAT 235S	NEL 870	<b>R</b>	2020 RU	SOE 8Y		
J29 AJS	BB21 GHT	C22 DER																	



# THE F1 ANALYST

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## OPENING THE DOOR TO NEW TALENT

As Europe finally becomes part of the current Formula 1 season after six events spread over the world, it's fitting the venue should be laden with heritage: Imola evolved from public roads in the 1950s into a permanent course. Italy's multiple Le Mans winner and brief F1 racer Emanuele Pirro feels he never quite cracked the track himself, despite winning there in touring cars, but he does have fond memories.

"As a fan," recalls Emanuele, "before I started racing, I always saw it as a special racetrack with elevation changes and a very peculiar layout that made it different from the others. It's a circuit where I never really performed very well but I really like it. It's very technical and the way it's been developed you still have this old-school perception of keeping its personality as it was before."

There will also be a massive amount of Ferrari support, with the factory just an hour's drive away. Fans will be absorbing the atmosphere but also discussing Lewis Hamilton's 2025 drive for Ferrari. While Emanuele feels it's a good decision he's



**The Imola fans are some of the most passionate and determined in all of F1**

aware not all his compatriots think the same.

"I think there are mixed feelings in Italy," Pirro confirms. "I've read some negative comments; I'm not saying all negative but normally a new Ferrari driver is a hero immediately. It's not in line with past opinions on drivers for Ferrari such as Sebastian Vettel and Fernando Alonso, who were received positively. But I do disagree; it's a fantastic opportunity for Ferrari and for Charles Leclerc to learn more, and somebody of the personality of Lewis can contribute to put things into a better order. Ferrari is complicated in a number of ways; emotionally, culturally and so on. Lewis can help build an even more constructive environment."

Despite his deep Italian heritage, Pirro feels the blend of teams in the UK can create an advantage that rivals such as Ferrari and Sauber, based in other countries, need to focus on.

"Much of the strength of British teams is the

exchange of human resources. By mixing and exchanging knowledge and culture you grow faster. If you open the door to people from the British environment it is a plus to import knowledge and assess yourself. That's why changing drivers can be good even if there's no doubt over their talents – because you have to assess the qualities of people with you. How do you do that if you never change them?"

Pirro's experience of five wins and nine consecutive podium finishes at Le Mans in the early to mid 2000s, as well as titles in the USA, have contributed to a wide view on the world of motorsport; just like Lewis Hamilton he's a fan of motorbikes and raced one for the first time last month at Goodwood, one of his favourite venues.

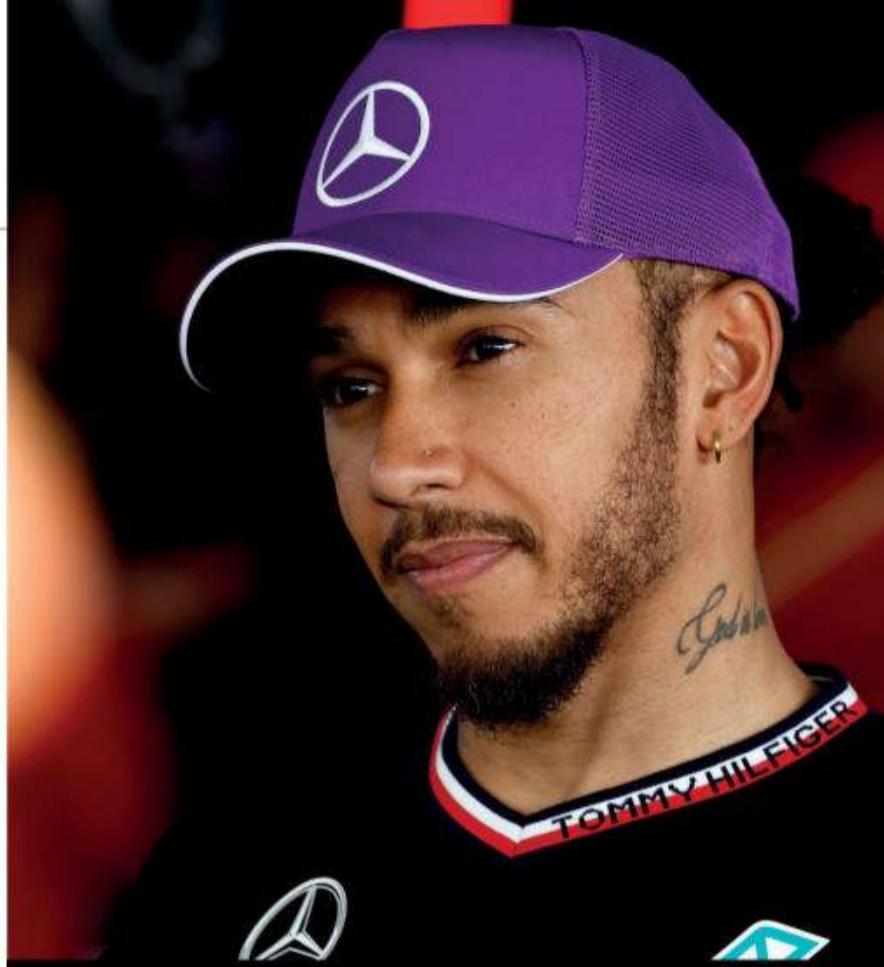
He is also keen to help young racers grab the chance to move up into F1 and he has a clear idea of how a rule shift might help.

"What could be changed in F1 is the way you give points for the constructors' championship," Pirro explains. "Right now we have both cars counting, which in the old days did represent the value of the team more than the driver contribution. Having two cars scoring when reliability was an issue was rewarding those that were more reliable. Now reliability isn't an issue but, by having both cars counting, it means the other driver, the one who performs less, is still crucial for the acquisition of those points."

In Pirro's opinion, teams are hooking up with experienced second drivers for regular scoring to secure a financially lucrative higher step on the constructors' ladder. Instead, if only the best-placed car of the pair scores it would provide the opportunity to offer a seat to a less experienced yet talented youngster who may become a future star. An occasional mistake would be negligible to the title points and would allow us all to see new entrants.

"Reliable, established drivers such as [Sebastián] Pérez have given what they know and they're very efficient because of their experience," says Pirro. "They cost not so much because they don't crash a lot and score the points but they don't give sparks. If you have a youngster who will probably become an even better competitor than this experienced driver in a year or two, right now nobody takes the gamble because the championship point or two or three you miss today are so crucial. If you didn't have the risk of losing valuable points, you could bet on younger drivers. I really think they should give it a thought."

Early in the season we saw how brilliantly Oliver Bearman stood in for Carlos Sainz in Saudi Arabia – but we're also witnessing a close battle between midfield teams for an extra point or two in the constructors' race. A system change as suggested by Pirro could open the door to a new fleet of future heroes.



Lewis's move to Ferrari for 2025 isn't unanimously popular in Italy, but Pirro thinks it is a positive move by the Scuderia



For all teams, Ferrari included, having two cars capable of scoring regular points is crucial in the current system, when those points equate to financial rewards



Pirro's only F1 start at Imola was in 1990 when he retired his Dallara 190 after two laps, but he still loves the track



Bearman's unexpected debut in Saudi Arabia, when he replaced the ill Carlos Sainz at Ferrari, showed that new talent can flourish if it is given the opportunity



Pérez brings experience and efficiency to Red Bull and a sackful of points, but, according to Pirro, doesn't really provide any sparks along the way

Imola stepped in to host races during the pandemic but has, thankfully, retained a place on the calendar since then





# UNDER THE HOOD

PAT SYMONDS

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## FLEXIBLE FIENDS? IT'S A MATTER OF DEGREE...

From time to time we hear teams complaining that the bodywork on a rival's car is too flexible. Often this leads to yet another test imposed by the FIA to ensure the principles of the regulations are being adhered to. But what are those principles and why is there a continual battle to find the limit of acceptability?

Article 3 of the Formula 1 technical regulations covers aerodynamic components, and this regulation requires that all aerodynamic components or bodywork influencing the car's aerodynamic performance must be rigidly secured and immobile with respect to their frame of reference. That, in the case of the majority of the bodywork and wings, is the chassis.

Now of course no engineering component is infinitely rigid. In 1987, 300,000 people walked over the Golden Gate Bridge to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The deflection was measured at 7 feet



Even structures such as the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco aren't completely rigid

which sounds alarming but was, in fact, only 75% of the safe deflection limit for the 895,000-ton bridge. So, if a structure this over-engineered can deflect this amount, it's not surprising that the bodywork of a Formula 1 car deflects a few millimetres at speed. The important thing, though, is to establish what is an acceptable limit and what contravenes either the specifics or the intent of the regulations.

This is nothing new. Even before we were able to couple computational fluid dynamic (CFD) simulations with finite element (FE) calculations, in other words link aerodynamic calculations to structural ones, we adjusted the stiffness

of components using empirical methods. We would have several constructions of front-wing flap, for instance, which would back off in different ways. So if the driver was complaining of the car being nervous in high-speed corners, rather than just backing the flap off and therefore losing front end in medium-speed corners, we would fit a more flexible flap which would lose load at high speed while maintaining its angle of attack at medium speed.

Tests in those days were rudimentary and often the adherence to legality was a matter of opinion. But equally in those days the final judgement lay with the late Charlie Whiting and his opinion would determine what was right and what was wrong. I remember one

instance when I was at Renault where our rear wing flap was designed to back off at speed to reduce drag, something all flaps would do to some extent. After a wet race Charlie came to see me and asked me to come with him to the scrutineering area to explain something on our rear wing.

As I approached the car I could see straight away that we were bang to rights. The deflecting flap was acting like a windscreen wiper on the rear wing endplate, leaving a perfectly clean arc on the otherwise rain and mud-streaked endplate. As always with Charlie the instruction was to get it fixed by the next race and, again as always, we did.

As analysis techniques improved, we were able to link our simulations such that the CFD-derived loads could be automatically applied to the FE programme to determine the deflection under load, and this deflected shape then fed back to the CFD to determine the new loads. After some iterative cycles of this, eventually an equilibrium would be achieved. The other aspect that helped our understanding a lot was when we started to apply these deflected shapes to the windtunnel model and measure something more akin to reality than was obtained from the extremely stiff model.

While it might appear simple and logical that a CFD simulation and an FE model can be linked it is, unfortunately, not a simple process. Both techniques appear, at a first glance, to be similar. They both sub-divide an area into many very small elements by applying a geometric mesh to them. In the

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Charlie Whiting inspects the Renault rear wing that was declared outside the regulations back in 2006

Small circles were introduced on rear wings in 2021 so that rear-facing cameras could detect any excessive deflection



case of FE, the mesh is applied to the solid structure, while for CFD it's applied to the surface of the structure and the surrounding air.

These small elements can conform to the shape of the object and hence the conditions at each of these small areas can be calculated more simply than would be the case for the entire object. In this case the FE equations will be solved for the mechanical properties of the structure, while for the CFD the fluid dynamic equations will be solved. Both require slightly different types of mesh but with care a compromise can be found that will allow the mesh to be suitable for both without increasing the number of elements, and hence computing time, too much.

Care must also be taken that an FE analysis determines values at the nodes or intersections of the small elements while CFD solves for the centre of the elements. Luckily with the elements being very small, this slight inaccuracy can be accepted.

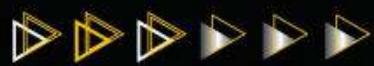
In a practical sense things have moved on a long way from the subjective scrutineering

favoured by Charlie Whiting. Today over 2,000 words in the Technical Regulations cover the various tests that teams have to carry out to ensure the flexibility of the bodywork is within acceptable limits. These generally consist of a given load being applied to the component and the deflection being measured at the point the load is applied. A more general technique was introduced in mid-2021 which required teams to put small circles with crosshairs on the rear wings such that the

## 2,000 WORDS COVER THE VARIOUS TESTS THAT TEAMS HAVE TO CARRY OUT TO ENSURE THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE BODYWORK IS WITHIN ACCEPTABLE LIMITS

rearward-looking onboard camera could be used to look for any excessive deflection.

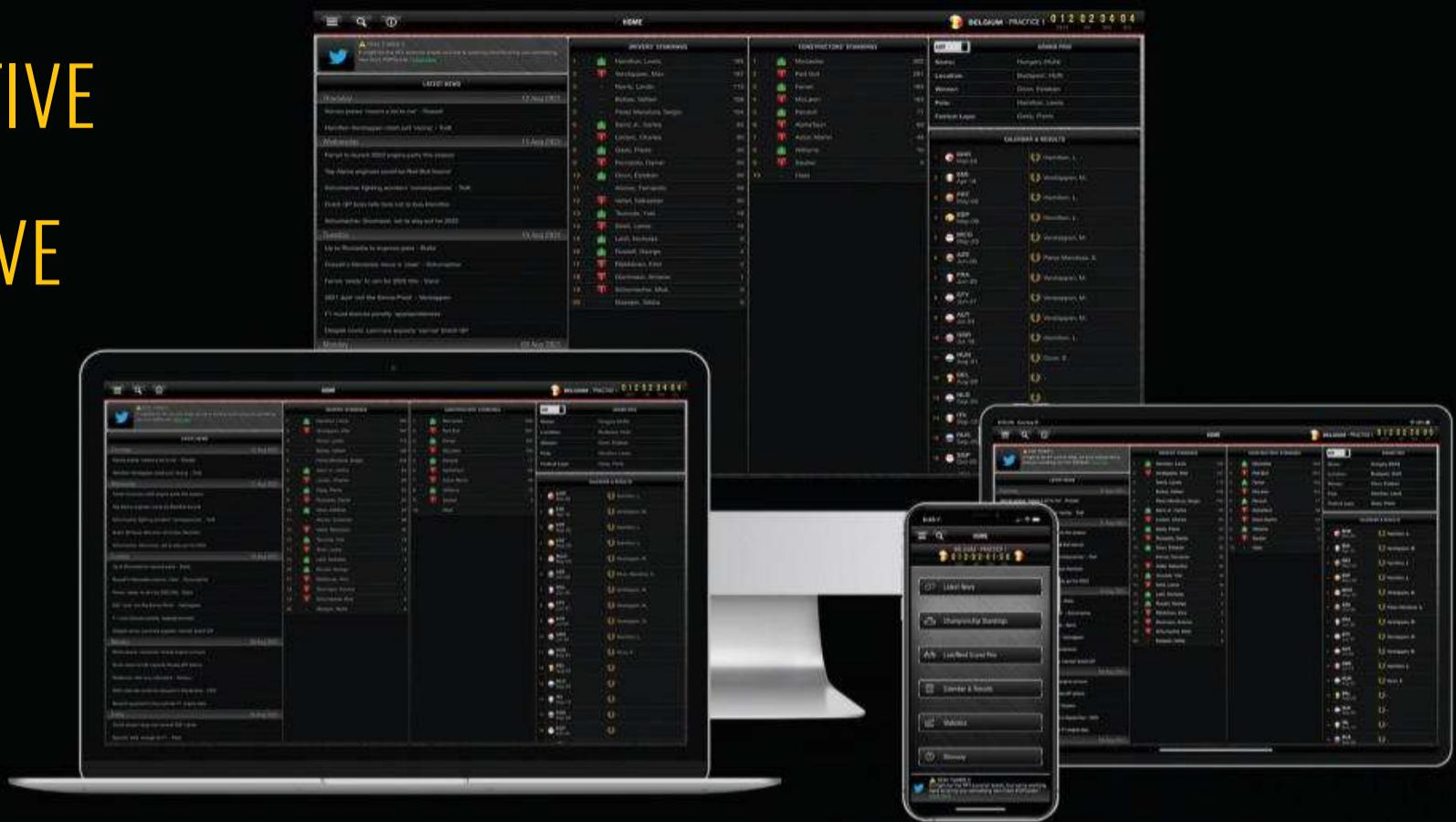
As always, the skill of the engineers is to take things to the limit of the regulations to maximise competitive advantage but no further. Using complex layups of the carbon fibre plies that make up the bodywork components, carefully tuning fibre type and orientation, allows them to get just the degree of flexibility that achieves this without incurring the wrath of the scrutineers and stewards.



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# STRAIGHT TALK

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## TWO WHEELS BETTER? WHY F1'S OWNER BOUGHT MOTOGP

**Liberty Media's acquisition** of a controlling 86% stake in MotoGP's owner Dorna, valuing the business at £3.6bn, is a smart move which will benefit the pinnacle of motorcycle racing and add value to Formula 1. Fresh from a 2023 in which F1 Group revenues grew from £2.08bn to £2.6bn, it's no surprise that Liberty's Greg Maffei was on the hunt for fresh targets in global motorsport.

Although the deal has to go through the standard competition and investment approvals process which will take up the rest of this year, 2025 will mark a new era for MotoGP as Liberty executes a growth strategy based on the lessons learned in F1.

Expect more events, adding to MotoGP's existing 21 races across 17 countries, along with a focus on growing sponsorship of the world championship, developing media rights and expanding the fan base both geographically and demographically.

The word 'synergies' will be used extensively as Liberty's executives look at the areas in which



**MotoGP's CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta**  
(above, with Marc Marquez)  
is being retained by Liberty

MotoGP and F1 can collaborate and complement one other. It's not hard to imagine race promoters striking combined deals for both series in the years ahead, although this will be balanced by exploring fresh opportunities in new territories.

Equally we will see media rights negotiations involving both series as Liberty maximises its

opportunity to expand coverage.

Toby Moody, the voice of MotoGP throughout Valentino Rossi's run of seven 500cc/MotoGP world titles, is confident Liberty has an attractive asset to work with.

"MotoGP has a golden pass for 'TV world' in that it's a 10-minute grid, 40-minute race and 10-minute podium all wrapped up in an hour, plus it has the close racing that F1 at the moment just doesn't have," he says. "MotoGP is now on the brink of where F1 was when Liberty bought it and that is exciting for everyone. Sure there'll be naysayers but MotoGP needs an evolution, not a revolution."

The enticing commercial opportunities are not confined to promoters' fees and media rights.

Over the years there have been sponsors common to both series, notably during the tobacco era. If Liberty can expand MotoGP's fanbase there is every reason to believe that sponsors will see the benefit of utilising both world championships.

Under Liberty, F1's social media growth has rocketed, albeit starting from a low base given that it was a blind spot for Bernie Ecclestone.

The opportunity to deploy a similar strategy in MotoGP is attractive.

Expect to see mainstream media as well as content creators and influencers comparing and contrasting bikes and riders with cars and drivers.

The similarities between Liberty's acquisition of both MotoGP and Formula 1 are striking. Both series were developed over three or four decades into an attractive, profitable business by a now-ageing executive. Both initially sold to private equity companies, F1 to CVC Capital and Dorna to Bridgepoint, but Liberty's expertise in media, sports and entertainment offers much greater potential.

One difference is that Carmelo Ezpeleta, Dorna's 77-year old CEO, has been retained at MotoGP. Bernie Ecclestone,

86 when Liberty bought F1, was hurriedly let go, carrying with him the stain of the 2014 bribery case through which German authorities relieved him of £60m. His recent admission of fraud and a £650m settlement with HMRC supports Liberty's wise decision.

The prospect of combined F1/MotoGP events has been tabled, but don't hold your breath. Combined events would only inhibit the one thing Liberty enjoys: growth.

## THIS MONTH

### Chris Gowland

Co-founder &  
Managing Director,  
The Sports  
Marketing Group

### CV

2017-present

Co-founder &  
Managing Director,  
The Sports  
Marketing Group

2016-2017

Global Commercial  
Director,  
Motorsport Network

2015-2016

Global Partnerships  
Director – Motorsport  
Division, Haymarket  
Media Group

2014-2015

Head of Global  
Partnerships,  
*F1 Racing*

2013-2014

International Sales  
Manager, *F1 Racing*

2012-2013

Business Development  
Manager, Interactive  
Investor

It's taken just seven years for the Sports Marketing Group (SMG) to establish itself as one of the top communications and marketing agencies in F1. As well as representing several of the biggest races on the calendar, SMG recently brokered the title partnership deal between Stake and Sauber. And the story began not far from here...

WORDS  
JAMES  
ROBERTS

**GP Racing:** When you worked on the commercial side of *F1 Racing/GP Racing* magazine, what did you learn with regards to sponsorship and marketing in Formula 1??

**Chris Gowland:** For me, one of the big appeals of F1 was understanding how and why companies have an association with sports. For example, what was the objective of Rothmans to have their branding over a Williams? What did they do with that sponsorship and how did they bring it to life? During my early days working in the F1 paddock with *F1 Racing* there was starting to be a change in how brands activated. In the old days it was simply a case of putting a sticker on the side of the car but, over time, more was being spent on how companies could directly engage with fans.

**GPR:** Since SMG has been established you've worked with nearly 10 different promoters. Tell us about the work your agency does for each race?

**CG:** Our primary goal is to help a grand prix tell its own story, something that has become a greater challenge as the calendar has expanded to include 24 races, since it creates competition for attention and ticket sales. To that end, we use a variety of marketing and communication tools – traditional and modern – backed by our team's expertise to best promote our clients [including the F1 races in Austin, Jeddah and Baku] to a global audience.

We've also established an office in Dubai to manage our clients' messaging to a regional audience too. This has proved to be of great benefit, allowing us to win new business in the region and to offer a more bespoke comms service to clients in this increasingly important territory.

**GPR:** While you work with promoters, your agency has expanded to include brokering sponsorship deals, including the recent tie-up between Stake, Kick and Sauber. Can you start by explaining the difference between the brands?

**CG:** Stake are an online betting and gaming brand whereas Kick is a streaming platform that is rapidly gathering momentum and starting to challenge the big players like

YouTube and Twitch. Kick's growth has exceeded everyone's expectations to the point where it made sense to promote Kick alongside Stake – and the reality is that Stake can't appear in certain markets because of certain betting legislation. But while they operate as two completely separate brands, they do have the same backers.

We were in touch with Stake over a year ago and suggested a title sponsorship deal but it's hard to find a team willing to give away the real estate and who will also partner a slightly more disruptive brand. During the period between Sauber parting ways with Alfa Romeo and ahead of Audi coming in 2026, timing-wise it was an ideal scenario. When it was finalised there was a common understanding from both sides they wanted to do things differently.

**GPR:** You talked about sponsorship being more than just a sticker on a car these days, how have Stake approached their F1 activation?

**CG:** Formula 1 was always on Stake's radar and when they go into partnerships they don't do things in small measures, as we've seen previously with their involvement in football, the UFC and their tie-up with the rapper Drake. They have a modern take on activation, using celebrity or influencer-led marketing more than the traditional model of having a large hospitality programme of entertaining 200 guests. They focus on a select number of ambassadors that have a big reach and will come to races to create more organic and authentic digital content.

**GPR:** What has been the effect of brokering the Sauber-Stake deal for the Sports Marketing Group?

**CG:** It's opened the door for us with regards to offering end-to-end solutions for brands who want to enter Formula 1. And while F1 is still the core of our business we're looking to do more of that in other sports. We've invested into events-hosting consultancy too, looking at cities who are interested in hosting sports events – not just motor racing. We can then offer a complete package of promotion, marketing and comms and PR around that city and its sport.



# McLAREN: SURVIVING TO THRIVE

Troubled businesses attract vultures, chancers and speculators. But the McLaren Group has avoided falling into such hands thanks to the resilience of its majority shareholder, which has now executed a full takeover. What does this mean for the future of the brand – and its racing team?



**Mumtalakat, led by CEO Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, now controls McLaren**

**Mumtalakat, the sovereign wealth** fund of Bahrain, has owned the McLaren Group since March of this year, completing its takeover of a business which has suffered more than its fair share of difficulties.

A look back through the past five years tells a turbulent tale, albeit one through which Mumtalakat, under CEO Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, emerges as the kind of shareholder many businesses would envy. In short, the Group has weathered the storms created by events such as the global pandemic, semiconductor shortages and delays in its automotive business, thanks to shareholders with deep pockets and a steely belief in its future.

Meanwhile, the ebb and flow of McLaren's fortunes in F1 are well known. The decline began during the final years of the Ron Dennis era, with a catastrophic drop in performance during the ill-fated Honda partnership of 2015-17, an exodus of sponsors and a series of unseemly boardroom battles.

The recovery was Renault powered in 2018-19, before a further on-track resurgence was aided by a renewed partnership with Mercedes and strong leadership under Zak Brown and current team principal Andrea Stella.

In 2022 McLaren Racing, which includes the Indycar Formula E and Extreme E teams, produced an operating loss of £9m but, while interest payments and similar expenses took overall loss to just under £58m, that was set against turnover surging by 55% to £328m. This was thanks in no small part to the revived performance of the F1 team, its success in attracting sponsors and the inclusion of Indycar revenues for the first time. In short, McLaren Racing has been heading in the right direction.

The Group business has been plagued by the complexities inherent in running a high-performance automotive manufacturing business combined with a series of major blows. Some self-inflicted, others far beyond its control.

To cut to the chase, you need only look at the impact of Covid-19 during the first quarter of 2020. While F1 fans in Melbourne were wringing their hands at the cancellation of the Australian Grand Prix on Friday 13

**WORDS**  
MARK  
GALLAGHER

March, there were somewhat deeper shocks running through the corridors of McLaren's Surrey headquarters.

In 2019 McLaren reported a wholesale volume of 4,662 cars, slightly down from 4,829 in 2018.

In 2020 that number fell by 64% to 1659. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and McLaren's board set about appointing a proven captain of industry to steer the business through the choppy waters ahead.

## OUT OF CASH

Paul Walsh, the highly experienced former CEO of the Diageo drinks company, joined McLaren as executive chairman on 18 March, 2020, just five days after Melbourne's cancellation. Together with McLaren Automotive CEO Mike Flewitt, Walsh acted swiftly, suspending road car production on 24 March, furloughing staff a fortnight later and following that with a radical restructuring of the business marked by 1200 redundancies across the 4000-strong Group.

To shore up the company's finances, US banking giant JP Morgan was asked to raise £250m through bonds secured on assets including McLaren's heritage collection and headquarters. Existing bondholders initially resisted that move, leading to a court case in June 2020 during which the *Financial Times* reported that, without fresh funding, McLaren would run out of cash on 17 July. Things were bleak.

Fortunately a solution was found in the form of a loan totalling £150m from the National Bank of Bahrain, a vital lifeline only made possible by Mumtalakat, conveniently also a shareholder in the bank. This crisis funding followed a £300m capital injection by McLaren's shareholders in the run up to the pandemic.

Mumtalakat had initially acquired a 30% stake in McLaren from Ron Dennis and long-time partner Mansour Ojjeh back in 2007. The Bahraini sovereign wealth fund had only been established the previous year, founded by HM Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain. Its interest in McLaren came about following Bahrain's addition to the Formula 1 calendar in 2004.

The Bahrainis' stake increased when Dennis cashed



**Before joining McLaren Walsh (with Dennis in 2006) was CEO of former sponsor Diageo**





**A sale and leaseback deal for the MTC raised valuable funds for the McLaren Group in 2021**



PICTURE: MCLAREN; MUMTALAKAT; MOTORSPORT IMAGES ARCHIVE

in his remaining 25% holding in McLaren in 2017, a transaction which cost £275m and left Mumtalakat with a majority shareholding of 57.7%. A further near-25% was held at that time by Ojjeh's TAG Group and Michael Latifi, father of former Williams driver Nicholas Latifi.

When the pandemic hit, everything changed.

By September 2020 the company announced that a refinancing strategy would include the restructuring of debt and the raising of fresh equity. In summary, the emergency measures of the summer were to be followed by the recapitalisation of the entire business with a view to stabilising McLaren in the long term.

That strategy included the sale and leaseback of McLaren's headquarters, including the Thought Leadership Centre, McLaren Production Centre and

the Sir Norman Foster-designed McLaren Technology Centre opened back in 2004. That deal took eight months to complete, Global Net Lease unlocking £170m in funds as the pandemic rolled on into 2021.

Also sold was a minority shareholding in McLaren Racing; American private equity company MSP Sports Capital acquired a third of the business in two tranches. This netted £185m, giving the racing business a £560m valuation, a strong result coming only four months after Williams was sold for a reported £136.6m.

### THE NEW STRATEGY

July 2021 saw a new round of equity funding in the form of £400m from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund and global investment company Ares Management, ►

**McLaren's road car business is battling to regain customers lost during the pandemic**



Stella and Brown have provided strong leadership on the F1 side of McLaren Racing



The F1 team continues to do well on track, as shown by Lando Norris's second in China



The McLaren Racing portfolio, highlighted at the Formula 1 team's 2022 season launch

PICTURES: McLaren; MOTORSPORT IMAGES ARCHIVE

plus another £150m from Mumtalakat. McLaren also announced a £500m corporate bond due in 2026.

As if the pace of change were not enough, the following month the Group offloaded one of its three divisions. The McLaren Applied Technologies business, created from the merger of McLaren Composites and TAG Electronics in the early 2000s, was sold to Greybull Capital Management.

The sale of Applied underlined the extent to which the new strategy was to focus on the core Automotive business, while the Formula 1 team and racing activities are run as a joint venture with MSP Sports Capital. The new Board comprised key figures from Mumtalakat, Ares and PIF, but change at the top of Automotive was afoot as Mike Flewitt departed as CEO.

Initially replaced on a temporary basis by board member Michael Macht, formerly a senior executive at Volkswagen and Porsche, Flewitt's role was filled on a permanent basis six months later by Michael Leiter. He brought with him strong credentials from Ferrari, where he was chief technology officer, and Porsche.

Under Leiter's leadership Automotive has set about

of convertible preference shares. Mumtalakat has duly converted these into ordinary shares, a process triggered by an agreed deadline or an 'event' such as a further funding requirement.

By last December Paul Walsh announced that a full recapitalisation of the McLaren Group had been agreed, the transaction process leading to the March announcement that Mumtalakat holds full control.

Mid-2024, McLaren looks very different from five years ago. Whereas car production had soared towards 5000 units in 2018/19, in 2022 wholesale volumes were 2188; last year that figure was 1569 by the end of September, reflective of those semiconductor shortages and what the company described as "an enhanced focus on quality". Financial losses have continued, a pre-tax loss of £274.9m in 2022 for McLaren Holdings and its subsidiaries, comprising the McLaren Group, followed by a loss of £276.3m for the first 9 months of 2023.

While the Formula 1 business has surged, the Automotive business continues to battle, streamlining its product portfolio, rebuilding confidence among dealers and customers.

Under Mumtalakat's ownership the next challenge is to fund and develop new models as the company seeks to launch an all-electric supercar by 2030. While discussions with automotive groups including Audi and BMW have been reported, industry observers believe a technology agreement, joint venture or partial sale to a US or Chinese partner seems more likely.

Talk of an IPO would seem premature – there is too much work to do in driving the automotive business towards sustained growth and profitability. Mumtalakat will be aiming to combine the power of McLaren's brand with new-era hybrid and electric powertrains to drive its continued recovery. 

## WHILE THE FORMULA 1 BUSINESS HAS SURGED, THE AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESS CONTINUES TO BATTLE, STREAMLINING ITS PRODUCT PORTFOLIO, REBUILDING CONFIDENCE AMONG DEALERS AND CUSTOMERS

tackling delays to the hybrid Artura model, hit by a combination of factors including semiconductor shortages, quality issues and even a fuel system-related recall notice issued by America's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration last December.

Additional shareholder funding of almost £600m has been called upon since mid-2022, including in the form

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Ferrari is the best of the rest so far in 2024, but needs to work hard to get back to regularly finishing top dog...



# THE LONG ROAD BACK

As another season pans out with one team – and one driver – very much in charge, a revitalised Ferrari is one positive indicator of title challenges to come. But it's going to take a leap of faith. A major upgrade is coming – but when, and will it be enough to shake up the battle at the front?

WORDS ANDREW BENSON

**A**mid the relentless monotony of Max Verstappen's domination of Formula 1 with Red Bull, there are few crumbs of comfort for the Dutchman's rivals. Chasing Red Bull has become a measure of relative success, of progress towards the distant goal of hopefully hauling in its advantage.

In that, arguably the team with the biggest cause for patting itself on the back is Ferrari.

The Scuderia has come on a long way since this time a year ago, when it was in something close to crisis. Ferrari started 2023 with a capricious, uncompetitive car, after a 2022 season in which an early title challenge fell apart in dramatic fashion.

Ferrari looked to have started F1's new ground-effect era on the front foot when it emerged in 2022 with the fastest car, and Charles Leclerc took two wins in the first three races, and a healthy championship lead. But mix together reliability failures, operational errors, an inability to keep up with Red Bull in the development race, and a couple of driver errors, and the season unravelled.

This followed a tricky three years that started with a controversy over the legality of Ferrari's engine in 2019, and then a dramatic fall from competitiveness once governing body the FIA intervened.

Unsurprisingly, by the end of 2022, the bosses at Ferrari had had enough and chairman John Elkann relieved team principal Mattia Binotto of his position.

Binotto's replacement, Frédéric Vasseur, joined in early January 2023, and knew even before last year's car had turned a wheel that he had a job on his hands. Within a few laps of pre-season testing with a car which was the result of decisions made by a team under Binotto, Vasseur realised it was even bigger than he thought.

It is a measure of the turnaround Vasseur has orchestrated, then, that Ferrari is in much better shape after the first tranche of races of the 2024 season.

## WHO'S BETTER, WHO'S (SECOND) BEST

In the first quarter of the season, Ferrari established itself decisively as F1's second-best team on average. Over the opening leg of the season in the Middle and Far East, Ferrari was only once not the best non-Red Bull. That was in China, which was a sprint weekend, which can often throw a curve ball, and one that was moreover affected by mixed weather.

On top of that, Carlos Sainz has won a race, and his performance in Australia in doing so was

so strong that it led to questions as to whether he could have beaten Verstappen even if the world champion hadn't had the brake problem that caused his retirement after four laps.

It's impossible to give a definitive answer to that. All weekend in Melbourne, people had been saying how strong Ferrari looked on race pace, but Verstappen's problem – caused by a mechanic failing to do up the bolts after a post-qualifying check – affected him from the off, so the only data point to compare Red Bull and Ferrari was Sergio Pérez.

The Mexican had a particularly weak race and finished in fifth place, nearly a minute behind Sainz. But Vasseur summed up the problems with drawing too many conclusions from that.

"Nobody knows and nobody will know," he said. "If you compare with the pace of Checo, you could imagine it would have been possible [to beat Verstappen] but sometimes the gap between Max and Checo is big."

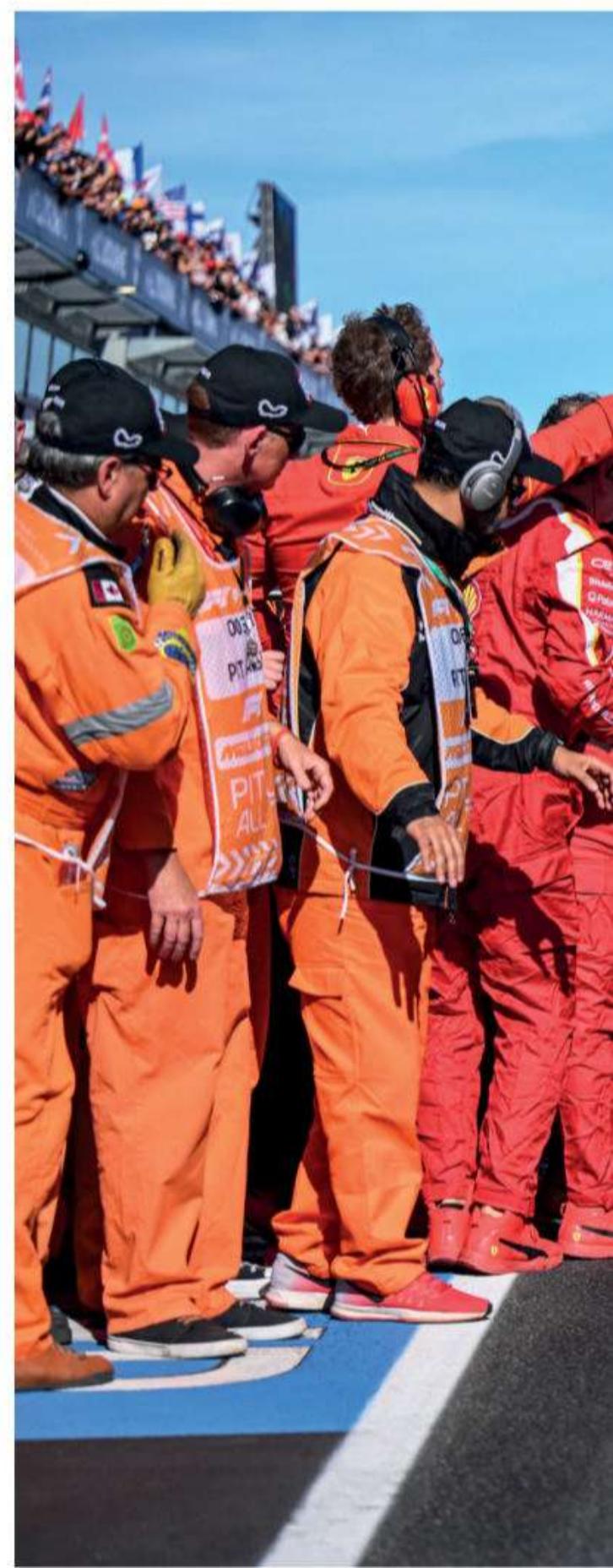
What can be said about Melbourne, though, was that it highlighted a specific set of circumstances in which Verstappen and Red Bull are weaker than normal and Ferrari stronger – a front-limited circuit, where the cars tend towards understeer and front grip is the defining factor, and tyre graining, where the rubber surface tears and grip falls away.

These factors also combined in Las Vegas, Ferrari's strongest race of last year, Singapore win aside. In Sin City Leclerc challenged the Red Bulls unusually closely, even re-passing Pérez for second place on the last lap, and may even have won had Ferrari pitted him under the mid-race Safety Car.

But Australia was also representative of a calmer, steadier, more effective approach to race management. Charles Leclerc qualified behind Lando Norris but Ferrari competently deployed an undercut strategy, which then required clever tyre usage from Leclerc, to secure a one-two. ▶



Vasseur realised immediately that he had a big job on his hands after joining Ferrari in early 2023





After the team's good start to 2022 had unravelled, team principal Mattia Binotto paid the ultimate price



Leclerc has been retained as Ferrari sees him as the team's future and not Sainz, despite Sainz's recent successes



Sainz won in Australia, where the team's race pace and strategy were both strong

# SAINZ AND PORTENTS

## ■ WINDS OF CHANGE

It is far from a panacea, though. Ferrari's average qualifying pace compared with Red Bull has actually fallen away compared with last year. But on every other metric – race pace, consistency, tyre management, operations – it has made clear steps forward. The consequence is a feeling of measured optimism about the direction in which it's going.

This step forward is the result of decisions made by Vasseur and the technical team after those difficult early races of 2023.

The peak performance of the 2023 Ferrari was relatively high over one lap, but its behaviour was so unpredictable that its drivers found they couldn't reliably access it. The car had inconsistent airflow, which meant that the drivers never knew what it was going to do when they turned-in to a corner, sapping their confidence, and resulting in a series of crashes. It was also badly affected by wind.

So Ferrari then set about designing into this year's car a much more benign set of characteristics, to create a machine whose maximum the drivers could access much more often. Coincidentally or not, this is the approach Red Bull's design chief Adrian Newey has tried to follow through his career.

Vasseur says:

**"I'M NOT FOCUSED ON RED BULL. I'M FOCUSED ON THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR CAR. PERHAPS ON THE ONE-LAP PACE IT'S NOT TRUE, BUT WHERE WE MADE A HUGE STEP FORWARD IS MORE ON THE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE TYRE COMPOUNDS OR BETWEEN ONE STINT AND THE OTHER. THE CAR IS MUCH EASIER TO DRIVE, MUCH EASIER TO READ FOR THE DRIVERS."**

"It's probably the biggest step we did compared with last year, to have something we cannot easily manage, but at least to have a good read of the car quite early into the weekend."

Having a more benign car also has knock-on effects in races. Fighting it less means drivers can be smoother and look after the tyres more effectively, making it much easier to maximise performance. The Pirelli tyres in F1 are so sensitive that any abnormal slide creates a peak of temperature, and each one of those

As team-mates, Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz have always had a relationship on two levels. Generally, they get on well and enjoy each other's company. But at the same time there is an undeniable competitive tension, and sometimes it comes out.

Take China, where Leclerc was unhappy about Sainz's robust defence in the sprint race, and Sainz was equally unimpressed with Leclerc's at the first corner of the GP the following day, which almost seemed a direct reaction, and which cost each of them two places on the opening lap.

Quite often, the way these play out seem rooted in what is, in reality, an unequal relationship. Closely matched, Leclerc is demonstrably the quicker of the two on balance, and he is the one who has always been viewed by the team as the future.

Sainz, although knowing he was always provided with equal equipment, knows both these facts. And they hit home hard over the winter when, in quick succession, not only was a new long-term contract for Leclerc confirmed, as expected, but Ferrari rocked F1 – and Sainz – by signing Lewis Hamilton from 2025, leaving Sainz without a drive.

It was ironic, then, that Sainz started the season so strongly, with a win in Australia and a podium in Japan, in both of which races he was Ferrari's

strongest performer. Victory in Australia was especially impressive, coming just two weeks after abdominal surgery for appendicitis.

It has, self-evidently, been a demanding time for Sainz.

"The year started with the news of the non-renewal" he says. "Then you get yourself fit and ready for the start of the season, pushing flat out. And then you get to Bahrain. You do a good podium. You say, 'OK, now the season is starting well and I can keep the momentum going.'

"And suddenly, boom, missing a race in Jeddah and the operation. Long days in bed, not knowing if I was going to be back in time. Obviously, a lot of unknowns. Am I going to be back fit? Am I going to be back feeling still good with the car? Then suddenly you come back and win. So, yes, life is a roller coaster sometimes."

Where will Sainz end up next year? One option has closed following Fernando Alonso's new deal at Aston Martin. That realistically leaves him with three possibilities – Red Bull, Mercedes and Sauber, which is becoming Audi in 2026.

But perhaps they are not all as realistic as some think. At Red Bull, there is at least one seat available – Sergio Pérez's contract runs out this year – and in extremis possibly two.

Yet this is a complicated scenario. For one thing, Red Bull was never that sold on

Sainz when it had him in its junior team. It took a while to promote him to F1 and favoured Verstappen when they were team-mates.

On top of that there is a lot going on behind the scenes there, following the allegations of sexual harassment and controlling behaviour made by a female employee against team principal Christian Horner, Adrian Newey's desire to leave, and a power struggle that could even affect Max Verstappen's future.

Mercedes is hoping to benefit from that and tempt Verstappen away from Red Bull – it knows he and his father Jos Verstappen have been unsettled by the Horner situation. If it doesn't succeed, the next favoured option is to promote 17-year-old protégé Andrea Kimi Antonelli.

The Italian might not be ready – he's only in his first year of Formula 2, having skipped F3 – but Toto Wolff clearly sees him as the long-term future there. Does Sainz want to be a stopgap?

The most likely option for Sainz might be the one that is least competitive, at least initially. He is the number-one target for Audi – led by Andreas Seidl, his former McLaren team boss. It will offer him a lucrative, multi-year deal and his future would be secured at a place where he was truly wanted and respected.

saps performance and life.

"What is true is that last year, the car was very difficult to drive and then into the race you were doing mistakes, damaging the tyres and then it's a kind of negative spiral" Vasseur says. "This year, it's much easier to read for the drivers to know where is the limit, to stay just a bit below – and when you have to do tyre management, it's much easier."

"They are much more under control than they were last year, when they were a bit in survival mode and in this you're killing the tyres quite quickly."

## ■ A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

In F1, this snowballs into wider benefits, as Carlos Sainz explains.

"We just simply improved the car," he says.





“Having a car that allows you to go a bit longer [before a pitstop], allows you to be a bit closer in dirty air and play around a bit with the strategy, just allows you to shine a little bit more, you know?”

“And that’s why it’s important in the career of a driver to also be in a [good] car, because last year in the races we looked like we were always going backwards, always defending. We

were terrible with tyre management and that was difficult to do good races. This year, it’s a completely different picture.”

For Sainz, this improvement in the car’s performance also has consequences for the team’s operational competence.

“We’ve made progress on strategy over the last three years, progressively,” he says, “but if you see a jump this year on strategy, it’s purely down

to the car. Just having a car that allows you to have flexibility on strategy is something that last year we couldn’t have.

“So, we were boxed in to stop at certain laps. We couldn’t extend. We had so much deg that it looked always like people could extend and then come back on us on a harder tyre. Last year, we were just zero flexible – so it looked like we were not getting the strategy right a lot of times. ▶

"But when you have a car that is better on tyres, two drivers that can push on the car more often and you have that extra flexibility, your strategy also looks better. And with this, I'm not underestimating the progress we've done. It's just I really think this helps a lot."

Progress there has definitely been, though, and perhaps Sainz underplays it a little, even if unintentionally. Think back two years, to the first half of 2022. Then, Ferrari had at least as fast a car as Red Bull, but repeated strategy errors cost Leclerc victories in Monaco, Silverstone and arguably Hungary. These contributed strongly to the team's title campaign falling apart even before Red Bull kicked on in the second half of the season.

It's clear the work Vasseur has been doing recalibrating the team's approach is paying off.

"When you have the pace it's always much easier to manage these situations," he says. "I will say also this is coming with the confidence that it's much more calm on the pitwall, and it's the best way to make good decisions. Everything is going together on the same direction and it's smooth."



**The Japanese GP also showed the progress Ferrari has made since September last year, but the car needs to keep improving to match and compete with Red Bull on a consistent basis**

Japan was a good measure of Ferrari's progress. On a track with a good spread of corner types, and which consequently exposes a car's weaknesses, last September the fastest Ferrari qualified 0.665s slower than Verstappen and finished fourth, behind both McLaren and 44s off the winner. Fast forward seven months to this year's Suzuka race, and those numbers were 0.485s in qualifying and 21s in the race – and Ferrari was ahead of McLaren.

Dig a little deeper and it's even more impressive than the basic stats. At Suzuka this year, both Ferraris beat both McLaren – one of which had qualified ahead of Sainz and both ahead of Leclerc – using two different strategies.

And Leclerc did so on a one-stop that was not only not the optimum strategy for overall race time, but which also featured a 25-lap first stint on mediums that was the longest any driver managed on those tyres. Something that in last year's car would have been inconceivable.

## THE CAR NEEDS TO STAR

One thing is still missing, though – a car that can compete regularly at the very front. Ferrari isn't even close to a position to challenge Red Bull on a regular basis.

Vasseur says: "We made a huge step on the high speed compared with last year – Suzuka is a good example – and on the tyre management. But now we have other weaknesses.

"It's always a compromise. You improve ▶



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Singapore (right) and Las Vegas (below) were Ferrari's strongest races in 2023 after some decent upgrades, and the team must repeat the improvement level with the SF-24 (above)



somewhere and you lose somewhere else. We've made a decent step forward. For sure they're still a little bit ahead. The target is to be able to put them under pressure and with pressure you make more mistakes."

To that end, Ferrari has a pretty significant upgrade coming at some point in the first half of the season – although it refuses to say when.

Sainz says:

**"THEY ARE DEFINITELY GOING TO HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN THE FIRST THIRD OF THE SEASON UNTIL WE BRING ONE OR TWO UPGRADES THAT MAKE US FIGHT THEM MORE CONSISTENTLY. BUT BY THAT TIME, MAYBE IT'S A BIT TOO LATE WITH THE ADVANTAGE THEY MIGHT HAVE IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP."**

Leclerc, too, has high hopes of the upgrade – but they are tempered by an awareness of both

the margin Ferrari has to make up to be a regular contender at the front, and the fact that upgrades cannot always be taken for granted.

Ferrari might well have hit its targets in changing the characteristics of the car from last year to this. And it might also have effectively changed course in 2023 and introduced upgrades that likewise did what was expected to produce a more benign car, with which Leclerc finished last year strongly.

But Ferrari's track record of upgrades before that is chequered at best – prior to last year, its failure to keep pace with the development rates of its rivals was a consistent theme, and a contributory factor to the failed title campaigns of Fernando Alonso in 2012 and Sebastian Vettel in 2017 and 2018.

Leclerc says: "What is going to be the game-changer is the upgrade. We will have to focus on that and as soon as we have them, that will give the direction for the rest of the season. So we'll have to get it right." 

*Andrew Benson is BBC Sport's F1 correspondent*

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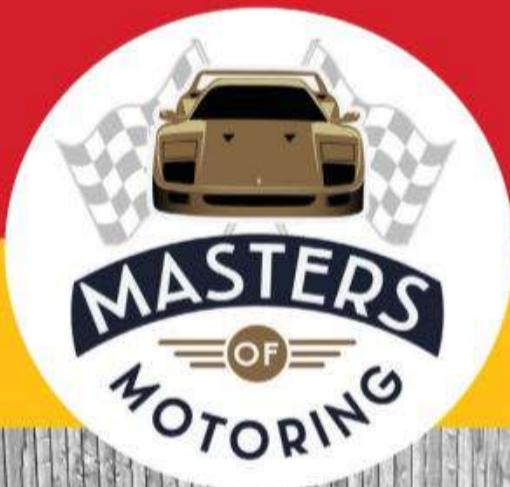
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# FRÉDÉRIC VASSEUR

Ferrari's team principal has been credited with engineering a resurgence in the team's culture and fortunes. But as he explains, the reasons for Ferrari's return to form run deeper than organisational changes...

**Fréd, in F1, when the car performs well, it usually means that the team has improved and become better. But sometimes the two aren't directly connected. Is Ferrari as a team in better shape now – and in as good shape as the car?**

Yes and no. I'll give you an example: I think it's much easier to have a good strategy when you have the pace. If you don't have the pace, it doesn't matter what the strategy is, it's always the wrong one. And the fact that we're more competitive helps us to have a good strategy.

On the other hand, I think what was important for me at the end of last year is that we left too many points on the table. Sure, nobody can have a perfect season, but compared with Mercedes or McLaren – I think Red Bull was in a different galaxy because they weren't under pressure – we left far too many points on the table. And we put a lot of effort into not letting that happen again. And so far it has gone well. In the first few races, I'd say we've scored all the points we could. I think we're more efficient on this part now. And this is important because last year, if you look at it, we lost about 130 points.

And we finished three points behind Mercedes. They also lost points, but twice less than us. Sure, you always want to have a better car, you always want to have more horsepower, more downforce – but then you have to be able to score the points that you can score.

**And it's going better this year, isn't it?**

Of course it's only a few races [so far] but we feel we have a good picture. If you look at last year, after four races, I don't think McLaren scored many points – Mercedes, Aston Martin were way ahead, and then at the end we were a hundred

points ahead of Aston Martin. It's much too early to draw any conclusions today. But at least we focused on all the weaknesses of last year and I think we made a good step.

**What have you changed at Ferrari? You came in late last year – and had very little time to change things before the season – but what's different about the team now, would you say?**

We've made some changes internally in terms of [replacing] the sporting director, [reshuffling] the strategy [department] and so on. I think it's working very well. What is good is the feeling that the atmosphere on the pitwall is very calm. We have a good collaboration and I think it's more efficient.

And the other change, but it's not [a question for me] – you have to ask the others, but... I feel like we want to take some risks [now] – because our competitors are taking risks. I think that's the DNA of Red Bull. They're always on the limit, everywhere, and I'm sure that even if we

were six tenths off last year, it's not [because] they had the magic bullet [worth] six tenths – with 20 horsepower more, or 20-15 points of aero – it's that they were just a little bit better than us everywhere.

I'm trying to push the culture of the company to be a little more aggressive everywhere.

**There's always the question of people not wanting to make mistakes because they might lose their jobs...**

I don't know about the past. But it's true that if you want to be on the safe side, on every single topic – you take a kilo of margin, you take two degrees of margin, you take two millimeters of ride height of margin – everybody has a much easier weekend! But in the end you left three or four tenths on the table.

**Exactly.**

And the fight is – we can now add Red Bull to this group, which wasn't the case last year – but last year between Aston Martin, Mercedes, us and McLaren, sometimes a tenth of a second or a tenth and a half could move you from P3 to P8. So if you leave something on the table, you're dead. And I think with the experience of that approach, you're more in control.

If you try to be on the limit all the time, I think you get better at managing that delta because you're on it every single weekend, every single session. If you take the margin, you're safe, but you're not improving.

And I think that's the direction that we need to go as a team, collectively. And I'm the first one to push. But I'm also the first one to accept that we can make mistakes.

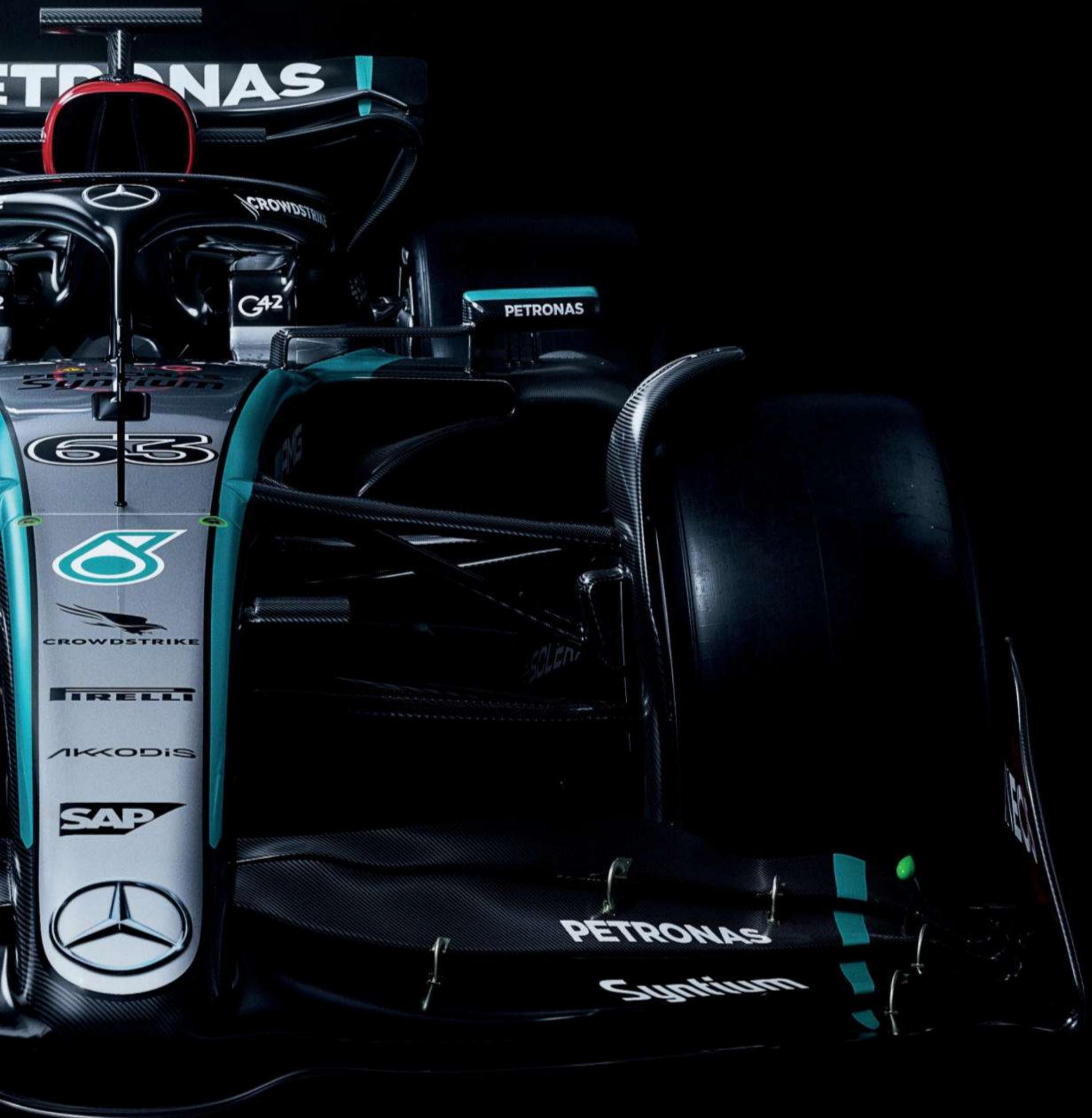
**IF YOU TRY TO BE ON THE LIMIT ALL THE TIME, I THINK YOU GET BETTER AT MANAGING THAT DELTA BECAUSE YOU'RE ON IT EVERY SINGLE WEEKEND, EVERY SINGLE SESSION**

# HAPPENING ALL OVER AGAIN

Having spent two seasons bedevilled by bouncing, Mercedes has (almost) fixed that problem but its latest car is still capricious, difficult to drive, and ultimately slow. The team's failure to get to grips with ground-effect Formula 1 suggests the beginnings of a Williams-style long-term decline from greatness – a view, it seems, Lewis Hamilton quietly shares...

WORDS ALEX KALINAUKAS





# IS THIS WHY HE DID IT?

Beyond the sheer allure of Ferrari and/or the sting of a 1+1 2023 contract extension revealing the timeline for Toto Wolff's driver succession plan. Did Lewis Hamilton look at Mercedes' initial design for its 2024 challenger, the W15, and conclude it wasn't good enough to keep him around?

For this is now Mercedes' predicament. Three times in a row at the start of this regulatory era, it has failed to produce a class-leading car in keeping with the iron-clad pedigree it established with seven drivers' and eight constructors' crowns between 2014 and 2021. And now Hamilton – its undisputed seven-pointed star – is departing. Possibly, disillusioned.

In the weeks that followed the shock announcement of his Ferrari deal from 2025 onwards, Hamilton talked up his love for the red team. But, impressively, at the same time he did a fine job defending and respecting his soon-to-be former squad, as you would expect of a sports star so versed in public message massaging.

As of the time of writing, that latter position has held. That's even as he's traversed the test and season-opening events in Bahrain, then sampled the W15 through the differing challenges of Jeddah and Australia and their high-speed turns following Bahrain's point-and-squirt, tyre-stressing nature. Then there was Suzuka and its all-over test of an F1 car, where Red Bull inevitably dominated.

Using that as a handy cutoff and the Silver/Black Arrows team can be said to be in a worse position, year-on-year, versus 2023. After four events last year, it sat third in the constructors' championship behind Red Bull and Aston Martin. This time around, even with Aston dropping dramatically, Mercedes is clearly behind Ferrari in Red Bull's wake and behind the much-improved McLaren too.

"You look at last year [in Melbourne, where Ferrari won in 2024's visit amid Red Bull's various damage issues], where Leclerc crashed out and Sainz was fourth on the road, McLaren were 17th, 18th or 19th and now they're 40 seconds ahead of us," Wolff said after round three.

"On one side, I want to punch myself on the nose. On the other, it's a testimony that when you get things right, you can turn it around pretty quickly."

## MIXED FORTUNES

Wolff's frustration at Mercedes' 2024 quandary – that it hasn't altered its results trajectory – is as passionately put as ever. As the team's co-owner, he is intrinsically tied to its fortunes.

Not that all of them have been bad. To a high-finance investor – declared a billionaire by *Forbes* magazine last year – the news Mercedes has become the first F1 team to exceed a turnover of £500 million, per its latest published accounts, will have been most welcome. Indeed, a Mercedes declaration in the filings included the line "in July [2023], *Forbes* estimated the value of the team to be \$3.8 billion".

All its successes really are Wolff's too.

But he remains massively competitive – his desire for





Mercedes to return to its previous position is abundantly clear. And going back to Mercedes' accounts underpins this desire: its profits fell from £89.7m declared in 2022, to £83.8 million last year. That has much to do with complex costs and tax changes in 2023, but the fall will still have been felt. Plus, there's how the team stated its "share of television coverage showed a small decline to 14.7% for 2023, reflecting the lower number of podium finishes the team enjoyed versus 2022".

Through the season's early phase, Mercedes failed to get anywhere near the podium again. But what was perhaps more important than the absence of headline results, is how its explanations for its struggles varied through each round. Such a miscellany just doesn't bode well for future success.

In Bahrain testing, the focus was on how Mercedes' decision

**"YOU LOOK AT LAST YEAR [IN MELBOURNE, WHERE FERRARI WON AMID RED BULL'S VARIOUS DAMAGE ISSUES], LECLERC CRASHED OUT AND SAINZ WAS FOURTH ON THE ROAD, McLAREN WERE 17TH, 18TH OR 19TH AND NOW THEY'RE 40 SECONDS AHEAD OF US" TOTO WOLFF**

to move to a pushrod rear suspension for 2024 had created a package that was "nicer to drive than last year's car", according to George Russell. Hamilton said the W15 was "a great platform to build on", while acknowledging it wasn't a Red Bull-beater.

Come the Bahrain race weekend and Russell's revelation that "the one area we need to continue to work on is probably the bouncing we're seeing" stirred memories of the porpoising issue that plagued the team's first ground-effect car.

The W15 was visibly one of the worst offenders for braking oscillation when viewed trackside in Bahrain. But what was really holding the team back was how, when the downforce packed on through faster corners, the car – like its W13 and W14 predecessors – still seemed to be suddenly shedding downforce, robbing its drivers of pace and confidence.

Hamilton said that was "still there" in Jeddah qualifying, which he felt made it "very, very, very difficult to push". And so, Mercedes' focus turned to how in the high-speed turns so prevalent in the opening sector at that street track it was "losing all the lap time", per Wolff. He called this a "fundamental thing" where the engineers "believe that the speed should be there" and "measure the downforce but we don't find it in lap time".

"It was like I was in a different category when I was going through the high-speed with the other guys around me," Hamilton added. ▶



# Divided by zero

**Has Red Bull really copied Mercedes' 'Zeropod' concept, or is this merely a delusion perpetuated by F1's legion of armchair tech experts?**

"It's not tactical, it's based on performance and what we're seeing through our simulation tools."

This was team boss Christian Horner's assessment at Red Bull's 2024 season launch in response to questions regarding how the RB20 closely resembles previous Mercedes cars in two areas.

These are the cooling gulleys that run backwards from the halo and across its engine cover. And on Red Bull's revised sidepods, the appearance of vertical inlets raised further questions on whether it was actually heading down a path to the 'zeropod' concept Mercedes had famously failed to make work.

It has been suggested that other teams assessed such a design for 2022, given the remarkable peak downforce it offers. But these levels cannot be reached away from the stable environments of windtunnels and it's in understanding the nuances of ground effect where Red Bull has been so utterly brilliant in this era.

Nevertheless, Autosport reported pre-season that a zeropod switch was coming for Japan. And while this didn't come to pass, rumours of such a future change persisted among rival squads in the Suzuka paddock.

There Red Bull *did* unleash an upgrade that concerned the sidepods and overall car cooling. But this was actually a new inlet atop the sidepod around the cockpit, which meant the ability to close off other bodywork panels for a downforce gain elsewhere. Cooling changes can have critical consequences for engines, but also downforce through the rear end – something Red Bull has also nailed through this design era. There was also a floor tweak designed to improve airflow through this intricate area.

"[Deciding to make this upgrade] was actually done before we even turned a wheel in pre-season testing," explains Red Bull chief engineer Paul Monaghan. "This was sitting there as a small performance gain."

Around the Jeddah circuit in Saudi Arabia Hamilton felt, at times, that he was in a different category to everyone else



**Toto Wolff is obviously frustrated with the performance of the team, of which he is a one-third shareholder**

## CORRELATION NOT CAUSATION

In Australia, Wolff was again describing how "fundamentally, whatever we see in the tunnel doesn't correlate with what's happening on the track". Questions over windtunnel-to-track correlation are a red flag to a bull for genius technical minds such as Mercedes' James Allison, but it was after Melbourne where he entered another twist in the story of the W15's foibles.

"We are starting to see a pattern emerge that most weekends we have a period in the weekend where we're feeling confident about the car but then, in the paying sessions, in qualifying and the race, that slips through our fingers," Mercedes' technical director said of how five times it finished among the top three in (dry) practice sessions through the first four rounds but only once (in Bahrain) registered a top three result in qualifying.

"If we were trying to draw that pattern together then probably the strongest correlation that we can make at the moment is that our competitiveness drops when the track is warm, when the day is at its warmest, and therefore the tyre temperatures rise with those of the track."

In Japan Mercedes' effort to help its drivers keep the rubber on each axle better in the operating 'windows' – specifically improved balancing with cooler rear tyres via setup – seemed to pay off. Hamilton called Mercedes' package in "a sweeter spot" and "the nicest it's felt over the last three years".

But still the results failed to materialise. In qualifying at Suzuka, Hamilton was on the wrong side of a 0.1s split that covered fourth-eighth. Russell insisted that Mercedes' weakness remained the high-speed corners and so "when you get to qualifying, you take the fuel out, the corners are becoming faster and faster and faster [and] the pace naturally





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After sometimes showing well in practice sessions, performance often drops off in the business end of the weekend, that is qualifying and the race

sort of goes away from us a bit in those corners".

After that event, Wolff returned to the correlation theory. Except this time there was a new dimension to dissect.

"We're measuring downforce with sensors and pressure tabs and it's saying to us that we have 70 points more downforce in a particular corner in Melbourne than we had last year," he said. "But, on the lap time, it is not one kilometre per hour faster. It doesn't make any sense. So, where's the limitation?"

The thinking has therefore turned from Mercedes' 2024 problem being rooted in the W15's aerodynamics towards its mechanical ride. Again, how Red Bull's fleet of ground-effect cars have succeeded through understanding this critical area is well known. For Mercedes, that rear suspension change means it has new data to understand. There could well be additional gains for it to find, but this is work Red Bull doesn't have to do.

## IF THE BUDGET CAP FITS

F1's leading team provides an important contrast. Its smooth run through testing and the first races – Melbourne issues aside – is easily explained by its 2022 and 2023 prowess. But at Suzuka it added a notable cooling and floor upgrade (see sidebar) and yet, according to Red Bull's paddock firebrand Helmut Marko, these worked from "the first outing" in FP1.

It's also long been clear how Red Bull's understanding and nailing these design rules gave it an advantage that's carrying it through, even as rivals such as Ferrari and McLaren – but notably not Mercedes – close. But Mercedes can't make more dramatic gains, as in the past, for one key reason.

"Under the cost cap regulations, if you start off on the wrong foot, it's perhaps more difficult to reverse your way out of that than it was when spending was less limited," says Red Bull's design legend Adrian Newey. "So, ironically, the regulations

**"UNDER THE COST CAP REGULATIONS, IF YOU START OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT, IT'S PERHAPS MORE DIFFICULT TO REVERSE YOUR WAY OUT OF THAT THAN IT WAS WHEN SPENDING WAS LESS LIMITED"** **ADRIAN NEWEY**



Merc's early results in 2024 are even worse than those in early 2023. Lewis Hamilton's second in the China sprint race was the only time one of its drivers has stood on a podium so far

that were designed to kind of make things closer arguably had the opposite effect, as rule changes often do."

It's worth pondering how the cost cap has inflated F1 team worth and made them financially healthier – in the context of Mercedes' financial results and how those extend to Wolff. But the team can't spend its way back into competitiveness.

The 2026 rules reset, with new engines as well as new chassis, is a big opportunity for Mercedes to reclaim its crown. But, given all the varied pain it's now enduring with the W15, soon to no longer be Hamilton's problem, Wolff is determined not to capitulate in the current era.

"We are Mercedes," he said in Japan. "We cannot completely abandon the current regulations and continue to perform on the level we're at. That's not the ambition of the brand." 

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# WHAT FERNANDO WANTS

The double world champion remains a fiercely ambitious competitor – and now he's signed a contract extension with Aston Martin which will take him to his 45th birthday and a potential 2026 title challenge. What prompted him to do that, given the more immediate possibility of a Red Bull seat?

WORDS STUART CODING  
PICTURES motorsport  
IMAGES



**Next year will be the 20th anniversary** of Fernando Alonso winning his first world championship. A year later he added a second one to his trophy cabinet but, barring a couple of near misses, he's been in the wrong car at the wrong time ever since. And all the signs are that Aston Martin isn't going to give him a car worthy of winning a third world title in the near future, even if owner Lawrence Stroll succeeds in his bid to hire legendary design guru Adrian Newey.

Soon to turn 43, Alonso has shown increasing impatience for a top-drawer drive. A smattering of podiums at the beginning of last season got his

juices flowing before car-development progress stalled, to his immense frustration. And yet he's voted for more of the same: despite options elsewhere, the ink is now dry on a fresh "multi-year" contract which will keep him in British Racing Green until 2026.

But how real were those other options? Mercedes, of course, had (and still has, at the time of writing) a 2025 vacancy alongside George Russell, since Lewis Hamilton is displacing Carlos Sainz at Ferrari. At Red Bull, Sergio Pérez is out of contract at the end of 2024 and Max Verstappen's future there is the subject of much speculation,



owing to the political machinations playing out in the energy drinks company's boardroom.

For his part, Alonso has been publicly chafing about Aston Martin's here-and-now, telling *Sky Sports F1* that despite having "one of my best weekends ever" in Japan, "it's going to be completely anonymous, everyone will forget by tomorrow this weekend that we had". In other words, finishing in the middle of the top 10, 44 seconds down on the leader, is every bit as painful as trying to conjure a finish from the back of the grid in a slow McLaren with a self-destructing Honda engine – his millstone for three

unproductive seasons in the 2010s.

And yet, within days of making that world-weary utterance, he was signing on for more.

Despite a claim in the German magazine *Auto Motor und Sport* that Aston Martin used Sainz's availability to force Alonso to stay, this story is believed to be a conjectural dot-joining exercise. Mercedes is understood to favour its young protégé Andrea Kimi Antonelli as the candidate, and indeed has brought forward the start of his F1 testing programme. Red Bull team principal Christian Horner has publicly backed Pérez's prospects of staying on, so long as he

keeps doing what he's doing – knowing his place and scoring decent points in Verstappen's wake. Max quitting is an increasingly unlikely outcome of the present political drama.

More pressingly for Alonso, it's an open secret in F1 that many teams are looking to the 2026 regs as a saviour, having capitulated in spirit to continued Red Bull dominance until then – despite Red Bull's assertions that it's running out of development runway. Regardless of the concerns about the present shape of those new rules (see sidebar), Aston Martin will have a Honda engine then while Red Bull will field a ➤

# The new power generation



**Porpoising was an unforeseen ramification of the 2022 rule changes. Will 2026 throw another spanner in the works?**

Teams currently pondering how to communicate to the world that they've given up trying to compete under the current formula are desperate for the 2026 regulations to reset the running order. But the mood music from the various stakeholders regarding the work in progress has been anything but harmonious.

At the heart of the matter is the agreed 50/50 ratio of internal combustion to battery power. The electrical side of the equation doesn't yet have the charging or storage capacity to support the level of performance F1 expects, partly because the manufacturers agreed to drop the costly and problematic ERS-H, but also because a proposal for an energy-recovery facility on the front axle was also dropped.

Active aerodynamics – think front-and-rear DRS with bells on – is the proposed sticking-plaster solution for this, but alarming stories have emanated from teams who have been working with the FIA and F1 to simulate its effects. There was talk of drivers having to downshift on straights or lift-and-coast early; more recently word emerged of cars spinning in a straight line.

Although it transpired that the spins resulted from evaluating one team's proposal to save weight and complexity by only having active aero at the rear, this was another demonstration of how change can have unintended consequences – even with the simulation power now available to the rulemakers. It's likely that yet another sticking-plaster solution will be imposed in the form of strict prescription of how energy is to be deployed.

At the moment, one of the bromides being pitched in support of the "keep calm and carry on" argument is that improved battery technology will dispel the problem. After all, Formula E progressed from needing mid-race car-swaps (complete with incongruous dance music, in a doomed attempt to engage a younger and more hip demographic) to single-car races with vastly improved performance thanks to almost double the energy density. The (wishful) thinking is that greater competition between manufacturers will fast-track development in F1. Perhaps it will, but without a clear and rigorous plan this is just kicking the can down the road.

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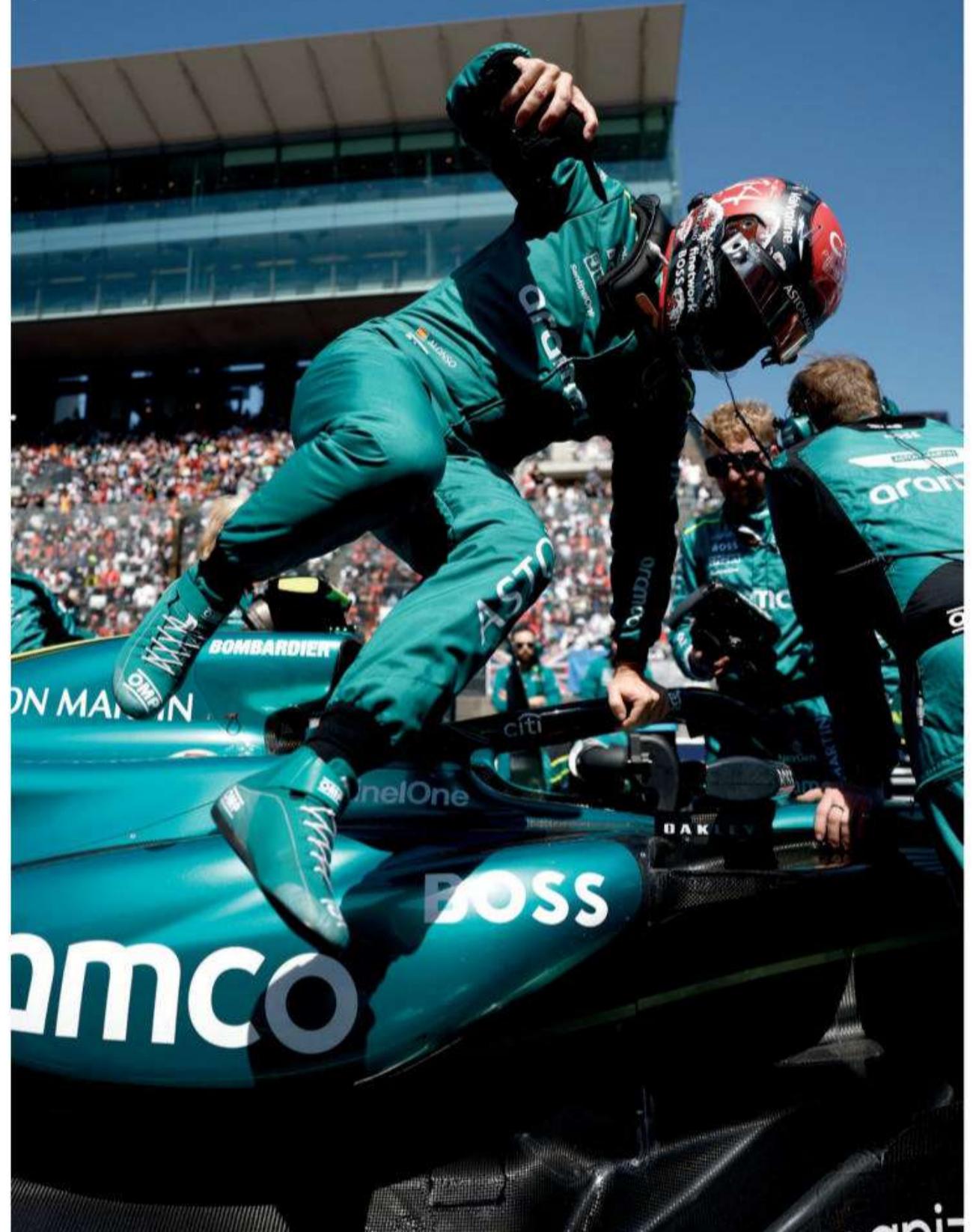
Word has been leaking from inside Red Bull that its powertrain project has encountered numerous problems. Horner's pronouncements have been evasive. He says it's "hitting the targets", but also that "we're on a steep learning curve, but we're on that curve and where we would expect to be on that curve at this point".

Whatever conversations Fernando was having with Red Bull, for a 42-year old abstract geometries do not a convincing argument make.

The only question for Alonso was whether he could commit the energy to staying in F1 through 2025, and another potentially frustrating season of nearly-but-not-quite before the opportunity afforded by 2026. With a calendar of 24 races, more than ever F1 demands full commitment.

He's now provided the answer to that question. As team principal Mike Krack says, "Either you are 100% in it or not. When you see how he's working [in the garage], how he's interacting, you see that there is only 100% for him." 

**"Either you are 100% in it or not. When you see how he's working, how he's interacting, you see that there is only 100% for him"**



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# LIAM LAWSON



## 10 THINGS I LOVE



Red Bull's F1 reserve driver on his obsession with the *Cars* movie and 'Kiwi dip'



### Music

I play and record sometimes. My dad's been playing music all his life, so he taught me and my brother guitar – and we've basically been playing ever since. I have been playing guitar since I was seven years old, so basically my whole life, and I do a lot of other stuff as well. And, yeah, occasionally I sing. Not on stage though – I used to do it when I was about 10, but not any more!

## SUITS

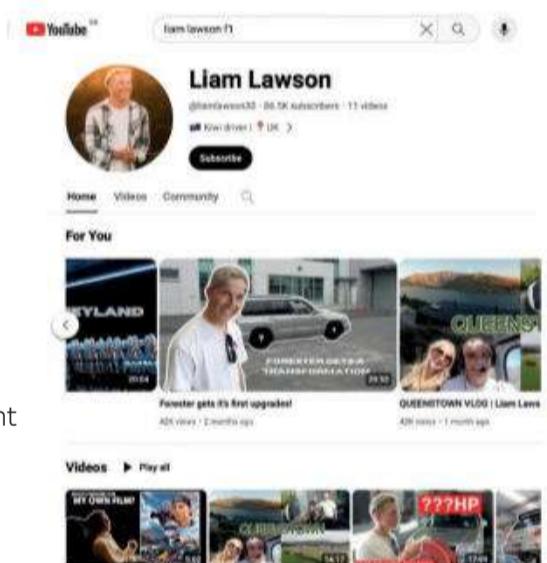
THE COMPLETE SERIES



### *Suits*

When I'm on a plane, I'm either watching Cars or Suits. That's my favourite TV show. I've watched it four or five times all the way through. I kind of like to compare myself with Harvey Specter. I feel like we have similar lifestyles and similar characters!

### YouTube



### Charity

It's something that's really important to me. We've done a few charity projects over the years, selling race suits and stuff like that for charity. The most recent one that we're doing in New Zealand is building a Subaru Forester that we're basically turning from what we bought as arguably a shitbox into something special. Now it's got the suspension all done, the engine's all done, it's got wheels... It's basically been decked out to be legit. And we're going to auction it off and all the money is going to go to a charity called "I am hope" which is a charity that helps people with mental health issues. Because it's a big problem, especially in New Zealand. My best friend from primary school committed suicide a couple of years ago. So that's part of the reason we're doing this charity. And I'll be doing other projects in the future.



## Motocross

I used to ride when I was a little younger and it was super cool. I'm super into dirt bikes, but I never raced or anything like that. I just think it's something really cool and I always enjoyed it. You always get a huge rush from it, especially when you're jumping – it's all pretty exciting. But it was always just for fun, and then eventually I was told to stop when my racing career started to get more serious – because obviously it's pretty dangerous. But this is the only other sport that I've been into, apart from Formula 1.

## Gaming

Not just sim racing – I like gaming in general. I dedicated a part of my apartment to be a kind of gaming space. It has a desk, a gaming setup for keyboard games, and I also have my simulator next to it. I play a lot, maybe too much sometimes. I just recently moved into a new apartment and I didn't have my gaming setup for about four months because I was away so, when I finally got it back, I played the whole weekend, just non-stop.



## Cars

I'm obsessed with this movie. I can cite the whole thing. For real. Lightning McQueen is my hero. I'm trying to talk to Pixar right now – if they do another I want to be a voice in it! I have an invitation from Pixar to go to their studios and I'm going to pitch them, "Hey guys, let's make a deal here," because I honestly... it's the best movie ever. When I was a kid, I watched it every second or third day. I have a photo with Lightning and it's my most-liked Instagram post ever – out of everything, including F1, it's me with Lightning McQueen!

## New Zealand

The country is amazing. It's just beautiful. The roads, the beaches, the mountains of the South Island. The scenery is absolutely fantastic.



## My Toyota Supra

I've got a Toyota Supra I bought and modified myself – you might have seen it in *Drive To Survive*. It's unique: when you modify a car, you make it your own and nobody has anything similar. I love it. I customised it myself. It's all my ideas, my will, my imagination.



## 'Kiwi dip'

When I was a kid, I was crazy about what we call New Zealand dip. If you've never heard of Kiwi onion dip, it's difficult to explain. Because when you think about it, it's really weird – but it's actually a really nice dip. This is basically an onion soup mix, but over the years in New Zealand it's been used so much to make dip that they actually sell it with a picture of a dip instead of a soup! Nobody uses it to make onion soup any more, they just use it as a dip. You buy this onion soup mix, add reduced cream and you get this dip everybody loves that you eat with chips. It's amazing! I used to come home from school, make a bowl of it and eat it all with chips. And my mom used to send it to me over the years when I moved to the UK, so I'd make it occasionally.



# COOPER



# IT'S 1963

Sketched on a plane, tested in secret, the car the team boss didn't want to make was exactly what Jack Brabham needed to win a second world title



NOW  
THAT  
WAS  
A  
CAR

No127

WORDS  
DAMIEN SMITH  
PICTURES  
JAMES MANN

**O**n the plane home from Argentina, Jack Brabham was busy frantically plotting, in cahoots with his friend and comrade John Cooper. Complacency is the work of the devil in motor sport and, just two months after pushing his frumpy little back-to-front car over the line at Sebring to become an unlikely (and exhausted) world champion, Brabham knew he and Cooper needed to work fast if they were to stand any hope of retaining their hard-won crowns in 1960. By the time they landed in London, the concept of the car you see here had been sketched out. The Cooper T53, aka the Lowline, was the fully justified result of good old-fashioned competitive paranoia.

The trigger was another funny-looking thing that Brabham compared to a biscuit tin. But in Buenos Aires at the opening world championship grand prix of the new decade, the boxy, inelegant (and also mid-engined) Lotus 18 had startled the world champions with its pace and obvious potential. The Scot called Ireland hadn't won the race, but had led it convincingly before a broken gear linkage and subsequent spin dropped Innes to an eventual sixth. Brabham's team-mate Bruce McLaren, the then youngest F1 race winner at the dramatic Sebring 1959 finale, had inherited his second consecutive grand prix victory as Jack's title defence struggled to get into gear, but the writing was on the wall. The company that had turned Formula 1 inside out and on its head in the space of a few months would play second fiddle in this still emerging mid-engined revolution, without a dose of direct action. Following a sweltering non-points race in Cordoba from which Brabham returned empty handed, that flight home would prove pivotal.

As Brabham wrote in his autobiography, "I told [John] 'we've really got to do something or we'll be left for dead this year,' and we began planning a new car right there on the airliner." But back at base in Surbiton, they faced predictable obstruction. Old man Charlie Cooper was conservative (and tight) at the best of times. "Why change it when we're winnin'?" was his response, especially when the supposed threat was posed by that jumped-up "Flash 'Arry" Colin Chapman. But Brabham was insistent. They landed at Heathrow on 17 March. On 14 May the Lowline raced for the first time, at Silverstone.



The car is credited to Cooper's long-time designer and engineer, Owen Maddock. Heavy of beard and an accomplished jazz musician (a natural combination), Maddock is something of a forgotten figure, despite his obvious contribution to the most fundamental and astonishing transformation F1 would ever experience. Compare a 1958 front-engined big-beast Vanwall, the first constructors' champion, to the far less imposing 'English Beetle' Cooper T51 that would succeed it: on the face of it, Maddock should be venerated as much as

## LEGEND HAS IT THE T53'S FIRST TEST RUN WAS EARLY ONE MORNING UP THE A3 BYPASS BETWEEN THE HOOK AND TOLWORTH ROUNDABOUTS

Chapman, Gordon Murray or Adrian Newey. That he isn't might be partly buried in the reality that the Lowline was the product of collaboration, cajoled into existence by Brabham more than anyone. And instead of a revolutionary with the gift of intuitive foresight, Maddock has been portrayed since as a man stuck in his ways as much as the 'Old Man' he worked for when it came to embracing fresh thinking.

The sleek, purposeful and, yes, lower T53, with its slimmed-down body and longer, more elegant nose to chase better top speeds, was a clear visual step on from its predecessor. The pedals, steering gear and radiator were brought forward to allow the driver to lie further back in what is now considered classic style. The chassis was a basic four-tube frame. On this point, here was the main crux of the technical opposition Brabham faced from Maddock, who dug in his heels to keep the curved tubing he believed in. "I knew that straight tubes could provide a stiffer, lighter structure, but no way would Owen



accept that and our argument went on for ages with Charlie consistently backing 'The Beard', recalled Brabham, on a design that allowed the 2.5-litre Coventry Climax FPF engine to be dropped an inch lower in the chassis.

Still, the driver eventually got his way, as he did on coil spring suspension over the dated leaf springs the Old Man obstinately stood by. In the wasted energy of these rows is the seed of Brabham's eventual decision to go his own way beyond Cooper and begin building his own cars on his own terms, and under his own name.

What Brabham did credit Maddock with was the new five-speed transaxle gearbox which Jack claimed was the designer's most significant contribution. The Cooper-Knight C5S – produced by specialist Jack Knight in Battersea – would prove bulletproof across the 1960 season. But John Cooper had to 'lose' the paperwork to get it made until it was too late for his baulking father to block its build on the account of cost.

Consider too that the Old Man was initially against a second chassis being made until the T53 was proven. That's why the second was hidden away from the old Hollyfield Road works at a newly established base on Langley Road. F1 is hard enough without such shenanigans.

Legend has it the T53's first test run was early one morning after an all-nighter – up the A3 bypass between the Hook

and Tolworth roundabouts. "I was about to repeat that circuit when I saw a police car going the other way," wrote Jack. "It stopped and turned around." Brabham sprinted back to the Hollyfield Road works where the shutters quickly came down; Plod eventually gave up on its unanswered enquiries. The car was then transported to Silverstone for a proper test, in which the Old Man's doubts were banished. The car lopped a full six seconds off Cooper's best previous times... although Charlie was canny. Two of those seconds could be attributed to a new track surface, he reasoned, two more to lower silhouette Dunlop tyres. But that still left two more seconds of speed in the car itself. Suddenly the T53 made perfect sense.

Meanwhile the Lotus threat had been confirmed at Goodwood's Easter meeting. There, Stirling Moss in Rob Walker's Cooper T51 found himself defeated in the Glover Trophy by Ireland – who then pulled a famous double by repeating the trick in the Formula 2 Lavant Cup. That pulled Moss and Walker up short. Both were fond of John and Charlie Cooper, but Moss – so often loyal to a fault – told Walker with a heavy heart to place an order for a Lotus 18. It was a decision that hurt sensitive John Cooper deeply, although it should also be added that Moss was aware he wouldn't be able to lay his hands on a new T53 owing to a fuel sponsor clash. Cooper was with Esso, Moss and Walker with BP. ►

## COOPER T53





Years later, Stirling would reflect on the contrast he experienced and explain to this writer the reality behind his hard-nosed decision: "The Coopers were much nicer to drive. They were everything that was fun about motor racing; the Lotus was not. It was far more delicate and unforgiving. But if a driver was of sufficient ability the 18 was quicker, at the expense of fun – although it's always enjoyable to win!"

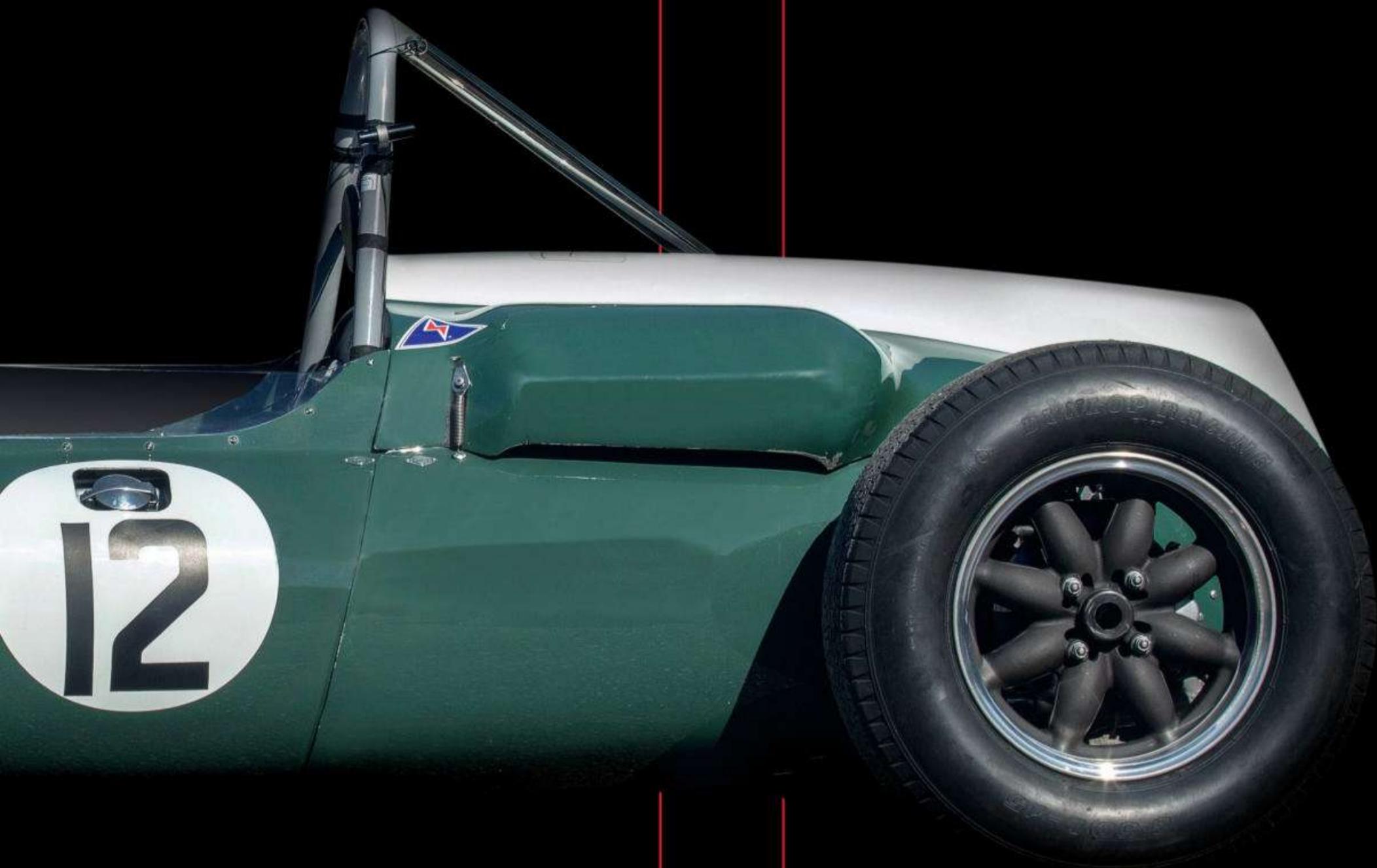
To compound the sense of a changing tide, Ireland won again at the Silverstone International Trophy, on a muted weekend when Harry Schell was thrown from his Cooper in practice and killed. In the race, Moss's T51 retired with a broken wishbone, while Brabham was second on the Lowline's debut having been forced to stop with a sticking throttle.

By Monaco, Walker had taken delivery of his Type 18 and

Moss justified his switch with an immediate victory – the first for a Lotus in a world championship-counting grand prix. Brabham in his Lowline had actually passed Stirling in the early going, only to uncharacteristically spin and hit the wall at Ste Dévote. McLaren survived two spins to finish second and, combined with his points from Argentina, found himself leading the world championship at this stage. His team leader had yet to score – but all that was about to change.

The Dutch GP at Zandvoort followed only a week later, so Brabham's T53 was hastily despatched to Langley Road for repairs and trailered back across the channel to the circuit in the sand dunes. At one point along the way it became unhitched, unbeknown to the crew in the truck, but trundled without damage into a field... Jack repaid the work and made





## JACK REPAYED THE WORK AND MADE GOOD ON SUCH FORTUNE BY CLAIMING THE LOWLINE'S FIRST VICTORY

good on such fortune by claiming the Lowline's first victory. He qualified in the middle of the front row, led Moss away and then caught a kerb stone which flicked back into the blue Lotus's path, causing a puncture. "Stirling seemed to think I'd done it on purpose," wrote the wry and doughty Aussie.

From Zandvoort on, the complexion of what appeared to be a promising season of Lotus vs Cooper cut and thrust quickly paled – via one of the most unspeakably tragic weekends in F1's history, at fearsome old Spa-Francorchamps. First, Moss was lucky to survive with two broken legs, pelvis and back when his Lotus lost a wheel through hub failure in practice. Almost simultaneously as everyone was distracted by helping Moss, privateer Mike Taylor was also severely hurt when the steering column weld failed on his 18, sending him crashing into trees. Yet worse was to come in the race when Yeoman Credit Cooper driver Chris Bristow crashed and died, followed later by the loss of works Lotus driver Alan Stacey, who is thought to have hit a bird. Brabham's subsequent victory was all too obviously a joyless one. But this was F1 back then. It happened, it was brutal, and racing and the world simply kept turning.

At Reims for the French GP, Brabham made it a Lowline ▶

## COOPER T53

NOW  
THAT  
WAS  
A  
CAR  
No127





## COOPER T53

### NOW THAT WAS A CAR

No127

hat-trick in emphatic fashion, on a weekend that highlighted the rapid rate of progress from the British teams. A year earlier Tony Brooks had set pole in his front-engined Ferrari in 2m19.4s. Now Brabham flew around the fast road course in 2m16.8s. In the race he survived a potential T-boning when Phil Hill ended his duel with Brabham by locking up his Ferrari under braking into the Thillois hairpin. The American sailed up the inside, narrowly missing the Cooper (luckily Jack had seen him coming), and shot up the escape road. Olivier Gendebien – better known as a Ferrari Le Mans hero, but also a decent F1 driver – and Yeoman Credit team-mate Henry Taylor were second and fourth, with McLaren between them in third, to record a high watermark 1-2-3-4 for Cooper. Lotus? Who?

The run continued at Silverstone when Brabham clinched the British GP, but only after BRM's first mid-engined F1, the P48, found its groove in the hands of Graham Hill. The future two-time world champion was on course to win his home GP (a feat he'd never achieve), having charged back to lead after stalling at the start – only to fall off under pressure from Brabham at Copse. Then in Oporto Jack made it five wins in a row, despite getting caught out by the slippery tramlines that also put paid to the victory hopes of impressive motorcycle king John Surtees, continuing his transition to four wheels with Lotus. Just eight weeks after his Spa smash, Moss was somehow back for this one, to pick up another lost what-might-have-been world championship campaign. By now, Brabham was virtually a two-time consecutive world champion – a status confirmed when the British teams chose to boycott the Italian GP because of the Italians' insistence on using Monza's wall-of-death high banking. Even in 1960, that was deemed inordinately dangerous and woefully outdated.

Cooper and the rest of the British contingent returned for the final championship round, the only US GP to be held at Riverside, California. Moss's victory in Walker's Lotus counted as little more than a consolation, with Brabham delayed by a brief fire caused by a fuel leak. Despite singed electrics, he soldiered on, hunched over the wheel in his signature style that harked back to Jack's dirt oval days back home. The final standings left him five clear of team-mate McLaren – who was a gaping 16 ahead of Ireland and a so-long-absent Moss.

The 1960 season is remembered as one that lost its puff too soon, at least in terms of a battle for the world championship,

tarnished by the awful events at Spa – a weekend that might well be judged beyond comprehension in our more sensitive age. Yet Cooper's achievement, with a quickly devised car that perfected all that the company had learned through its roots in the 500cc junior category and its breakthrough F1 seasons of 1958 and '59, is all too easily overlooked.

That's probably because of what followed across the rest of the decade. As F1 scaled down to 1.5-litre engines in 1961, Ferrari's V6-powered 'Sharknose' 156 stole a march on the strangely complacent British teams, before Lotus and BRM forged ahead into 1962. This would be Chapman's decade – and Cooper faded all too quickly. Brabham spotted the drift early and soon took that decision to forge his own path, while Cooper's remarkable exploits in pioneering F1 cars that pushed rather than pulled drivers to world championship success would eventually be overshadowed by an iconic alliance that still burns bright in our collective consciousness. Think of Charlie and John's surname today and it's likely first to be in association with the era-defining wonder that is the Mini.

But again the Lowline deserves more credit, and not just for what it achieved on the F1 circuits of Europe. The model also played a crucial pioneering role in a mid-engined revolution that arguably created an even greater discombobulation of shock – across the Atlantic at Indianapolis. For it was John Cooper and Jack Brabham, not Colin Chapman and Jim Clark, who first blew the doors off the Indy 500 and signalled the end of the hallowed front-engine roadster era.

In October 1960, as Brabham headed west before the US GP, he and Cooper embarked on a fact-finding mission to The Brickyard, encouraged by Indy hero Rodger Ward. The penny dropped early for Ward on mid-engined potential after his ill-advised attempt to race in the 1959 Sebring GP – in a dirt-oval midget! Striking up a friendship with Brabham that weekend, he quickly learned how much he'd underestimated F1 performance and the experience planted a seed.

Lured by Ward's conviction and in no small part by how much prize money the Indy 500 offered, Brabham pitched up at The Brickyard where a T53 Lowline was waiting for him. What he hadn't expected was the Speedway insisting the two-time reigning world champion should still undergo the strict rookie orientation programme, building up his speed around the rectangular 2.5-mile 'oval' in a controlled and what felt

THE LOWLINE  
DESERVES MORE  
CREDIT, AND  
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WHAT IT ACHIEVED  
ON THE F1 CIRCUITS  
OF EUROPE



like painfully slow manner. Perplexed, Brabham eventually sent a bolt through the front-engined roadster establishment by lapping fast enough to have qualified eighth for the 1960 Indy 500. He and Cooper returned the following May, juggling transatlantic flights to keep up with the F1 schedule at Monaco and Zandvoort, to qualify and race at the Indy 500.

Brabham and his specially adapted Kimberly Cooper Special – named after the millionaire behind the Kleenex tissue brand – finished ninth. He'd have finished higher without one of the American crew cross-threading the nut on his offside rear wheel, thereby lengthening each of Brabham's three stops as the nut was forcefully hammered on and off.

But the cat was out of the bag, long-held reverential tradition was thrown to the winds – and Chapman was watching. Lotus rather than Cooper picked up the charge, Jim Clark storming to a game-changing landmark at the 500 in 1965. But in an echo of F1, it had been its Surbiton rival and the pretty Lowline that had first pointed the way. 

#### RACE RECORD

**Starts** 54  
**Wins** 6  
**Poles** 3  
**Fastest laps** 4  
**Podiums** 5  
**Championship points** 50\*

\*Only the best-placed car from each manufacturer at each round, and the best six results, counted in 1960; best five results in 1961

#### SPECIFICATION

**Chassis** Tubular steel frame  
**Suspension** Double wishbones with coil springs  
**Engine** Coventry Climax inline four cylinder  
**Engine capacity** 2497cc (1960), 1499cc (1961)  
**Power** 230bhp @ 7000rpm (1960), 151bhp @ 7500 rpm (1961)  
**Gearbox** Five-speed Cooper-Knight C5S  
**Brakes** Steel discs  
**Tyres** Dunlop  
**Weight** 500kg  
**Notable drivers** Jack Brabham, Bruce McLaren, John Surtees



Jean-François Ruchaud, in amongst the FIA records that still remain intact, and he has been responsible for since November 2012



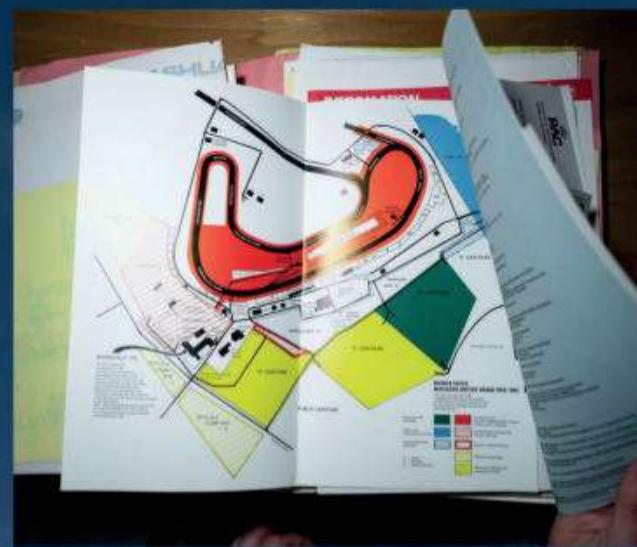
# THE SECRET SERVICE

Episodes of fire and flood have destroyed much of motor racing's historic records. The FIA is now archiving it safely in one of its French HQs. As *GP Racing* discovered, many of the documents – including letters from Enzo Ferrari – remain confidential to this day...

WORDS OLEG KARPOV PICTURES MALCOLM GRIFFITHS

**A**SHORT GREY-HAIRED MAN WEARING glasses and a jacket over a crimson jumper grabs a notebook with a hard, cracked cover from a rack. “Association Internationale des Automobile Clubs Reconnus – Procès-Verbaux des Assemblées Générales – 1904-1923” says the hand-written note pasted on top. This is a collection of (also hand-written) reports from the very first general meetings of the International Association of Recognised Automobile Clubs, which is now known as Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile – or, simply, the FIA. There’s a note on the first page, dated 20 June 1904, with a list of its founding members – a dozen clubs from various European countries. Over the past 120 years the members’ list has grown by a couple of hundred clubs and national federations.

The aforementioned notebook is one of the documents preserved in the FIA archive, now located in Valleiry in one of the Federation’s four headquarters. The historical documents are now kept in two rooms of the two-storey building (the least ostentatious of those head offices) in a small French town next to the Swiss border. Primarily, the building is used for homologation procedures for cars of various classes – but ➤



**GP Racing** has to be watched as it dipped into some of those records that have survived, including ones which note the founding of the FIA 120 years ago

since 2015 it's also served as the archive's new home.

"Many documents from the beginning of the last century were damaged during the last World War," Jean-François Ruchaud tells *GP Racing* as he guides us through the archive. The Frenchman has been looking after it for more than a decade now.

"Part of the archive was under the swimming pool of the Automobile Club de France during that time," he sighs, "and there was a flood, so a lot of things were destroyed. I saw piles of documents that were like bricks – you know, you just couldn't separate the papers.

"Then it was moved to the warehouse in Clichy, where a lot of archive documents were burned in a fire in September 1982 – virtually everything that was there."

It's that fire that is primarily responsible for the FIA's Valleiry archive having virtually none of the documents from Formula 1 rounds held before 1981. Those that remain intact occupy a few shelves at most, and not all of them are even available to be viewed. Jean-François, after all, is not only here to show us around, but also to make sure we don't go rifling through the wrong bits. In the corner of the room are a handful of folders we aren't permitted to peruse, much less photograph.

Also inaccessible are the documents relating to Formula 1 races from the year 2000 to now – Ruchaud is only allowed to

share them by special dispensation.

"I started taking care of the archive in November 2012, when it was still in Paris," he recalls. "They were looking for somebody who wasn't a journalist or a writer, but who'd know a bit of history. I was a member of the French Federation of Vintage Vehicles, and I also speak English, important because most of the documents are in French or in English.

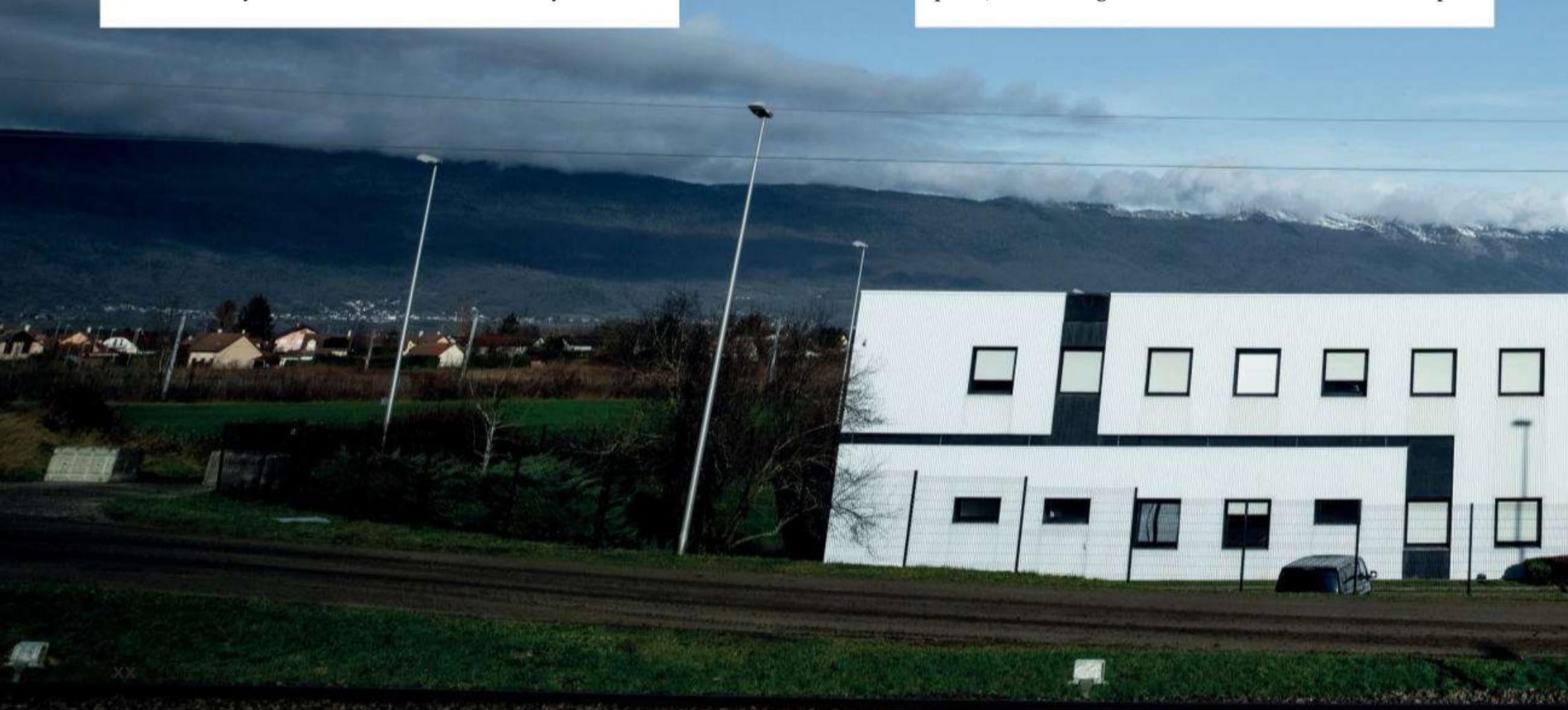
"A lot of things like hotel bills, hire car bills and so on didn't need to be kept – but everything that was of any interest at all we began to send over to Valleiry.

"And of course some of the documents are still confidential – like letters written and signed by Enzo Ferrari."

## COME ON OVER TO VALLEIRY

Even with all those restrictions, someone passionate about motorsport could lose hours studying what is available here. A folder with the documents from Formula 1's first-ever grand prix in Las Vegas – the one in the parking lot behind Caesars Palace – is a true testament to how far the sport has come in the last half-century.

Handwritten notes from one of the practice sessions include quaint, now-unimaginable comments like "Unknown car spun





The documents in Valleiry (main image) are now being digitised, but in case of another conflagration there are canisters outside the room with a special gas to prevent a fire

and continued at Turn 3". There are also someone's jottings from a meeting dedicated to hashing out the 1982 F1 calendar – featuring drawings by this person, presumably bored by said meeting: for example, a reminder to fax then-FISA president Jean-Marie Balestre is underlined twice, those two lines then growing into a droll sketch of a cuttlefish of some sorts.

Also here is a smattering of documents signed by Balestre, issuing fines for missed briefings, the ones Jean-Marie himself so dearly loved to take part in.

One of the heaviest – and one of the most "demanding", according to Jean-François – folders includes the notes and documents from the Lotus 88 'twin chassis' saga.

But there's heavier ones – many times heavier, too – from closer to the end of the century. The findings of an investigation into Michael Schumacher's 1999 crash at Silverstone, with all the minute details about the causes and circumstances of the incident in which Michael broke his leg, take up hundreds of pages. As for the pages relating to Ferrari's disqualification from Malaysia that same year, there are twice as many.

These documents, Ruchaud says, also attract heightened interest – although clearly in a relative sense. The number of visitors to the archive you can count on your hands. It is, at least for now, closed to the wider public, and Jean-François' principal guests are journalists and history researchers, who

come to Valleiry no more than once every couple of months.

Ruchaud himself continues to live in Paris and comes to the FIA's Centre of Excellence (the official name of the Valleiry office) for a few days every month, mostly to oversee the digitisation of the archive. Jean-François's colleague, however, the one who scans the remaining documents one by one, is here every day. But even though only a small share of documents from the Federation's 120-year history has been preserved, the digitisation isn't even half done.

At the very least, there's no reason to fear another fire. Just outside the rooms hosting the documents are canisters with a special gas, which will displace all the oxygen in case the smoke detectors go off, thus preventing any fire from spreading.

"You'll have to go out of the room within three minutes of hearing the alarm," explains Jean-François, pointing to the canisters, "because otherwise you have no more oxygen to breathe. But it's much better than the normal fire extinguishers or sprinklers with water – because then all the documents would be destroyed again."

There's no clear plan so far as to whether the FIA will make at least part of this archive open to public. But some of the papers will definitely be made available on the FIA's official website, and will then perhaps go on display in a standalone exhibition. The secrets will remain... secret.



In the first of a new regular series, we go behind the scenes with key Formula 1 personnel over a grand prix weekend to explore the rigours of the job. Here we follow Haas team manager **Peter Crolla** through F1's return to China...

WORDS OLEG KARPOV  
PICTURES MARK SUTTON

 **motorsport**  
IMAGES

# A RACE WEEKEND WITH...

## THE TEAM MANAGER



# A

Formula 1 team at a grand prix is like a travelling orchestra – except the musicians aren't all sitting in one place during the performance and the 'concert' lasts for more than a week, from the arrival of the first staff to the departure of the last pieces of equipment.

Every element of an F1 team's on-track operation is structured. Each of the nearly 100 team members has a clear understanding of their role, in some cases – such as during a pitstop – down to every step, every second.

The team manager's job is a like a conductor's – and at Haas it's Peter Crolla's job to schedule the many meetings over a race weekend and ensure those 100-odd people work as a united whole. His

responsibilities also include overseeing the team's logistics and representing the team on various committees. It's also the team manager's remit to be a point of contact for F1 race organisers.

Crolla also acts as its sporting director (a common practice), ensuring the team adheres to regulations during all sessions. It's Crolla who deals with the FIA when the team's drivers are involved in accidents – and he who accompanies Kevin Magnussen and Nico Hülkenberg to the stewards' office when they're summoned.

He's in charge of the team's mechanics and heads up Haas's pitstop group, constantly trying to improve the team's performance in this area.

Here's what a typical race weekend looks like...

# THURSDAY

06.30

## Arrival at the track

"Thursday is all about making sure we're ready for the weekend. Normally I'd meet with our chief mechanic, race team coordinator and chief garage technician in the morning to see where we are in terms of car build and garage setup. The guys had made a good start on Wednesday with the car prep, as well as making sure we'd got the spare chassis in a good condition, which is particularly important going into a sprint weekend."



Crolla gets the team together early on Thursday to make sure it is ready for the weekend

10.00

## Marketing team catch-up

"A quick meeting, mainly about what we've got in terms of partners and guests for the weekend."

12.00

## Security briefing

"An online meeting, organised by the circuit with the FIA, FOM, all the teams in attendance, to update us on any security matters. Some details might vary – we've got some races

where the security threat might be quite high, there could also be visiting dignitaries. But here it's all quite standard."

12.30

## Catching up with the team principal

"A 15-minute chat with Ayao Komatsu, this time mainly about some regulatory updates from the Sporting Advisory Committee. I represent the team at these meetings and it's always important to confirm our position internally on key points before he attends the

Thursday's pitstop practice is usually the most detailed, with various scenarios tested

upcoming F1 Commission meeting."

13.00

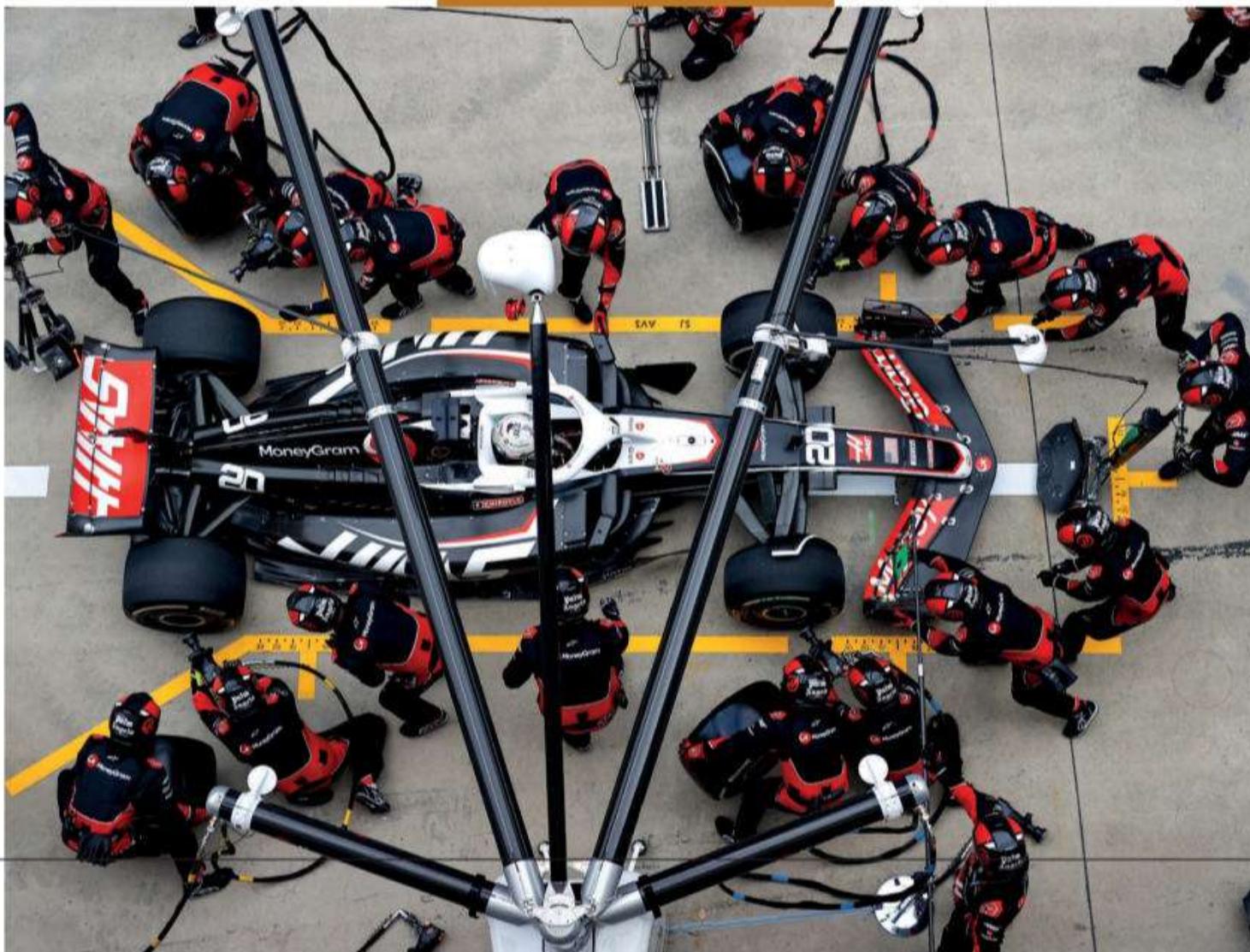
## Track walk

"I do it mainly to look at any changes since the last time we were here, to remind myself where the Safety Car lines are, all the basics – so when there's a question, I can give a clear answer straight away."

15.00

## FIA track test

"On Thursdays, the FIA do their systems check with Safety and Medical Cars on track. It's a good time for us to join in and check all our intercom systems, data and telemetry."



16.00

## Pitstop practice 1

"We try to do four practices over the weekend. The one on Thursday is usually about more complex scenarios: double stops, nose changes and other eventualities. We've done 10 stops, all with the guys running out of the garage, including a couple to see how prepared we were for a late call.

"Kevin's stop in Japan wasn't ideal. It was called later than we would normally have as a cut-off time and the guys responded well. It wasn't a disaster. Equally we looked at what wasn't perfect and tried to implement some changes.

"We have a pitstop group – me, our chief mechanic, the physio and the strategy engineer – and we have a meeting every week to see how we can improve. Everything in the garage is positioned in a certain way. We have to think about the role of each of our crew members, because that affects where they sit, their route to the position and the timing from the garage to the pitlane – and that's planned in great detail.

"We've been working on our timing, our positioning and also making sure there aren't too many obstacles when they leave the garage – be it chairs, tyres or other humans. The guys have been very receptive and the practice went smoothly." ▶

# F1 UNCOVERED

## FRIDAY

08.30

### Team managers' meeting

"This is an in-person meeting in the press conference room between all team managers, the FIA and F1. It's usually split into three parts: we start with the previous event, then the current one and then there's a section for 'any other business'. Sometimes it's really small things. Here, for example, they gave us instructions on what to do if a driver stops between Turns 13 and 14 – they wanted it parked on the left because it's easier to recover."



10.00

### Pitstop practice 2

"Nine practice stops. Some scenarios, like nose changes and air bottle refills, and some normal stops. The crew never know what's coming next and only find out when they get my call from the pitwall – just to keep them on their toes!"

10.30

### Free practice 1 programme meeting

"This is an engineer-led meeting we have before every session. I attend just to be aware of what the run plan is, and if there's anything to discuss from a sporting or operational perspective."

11.30

### Free practice 1

"I'm on the pitwall for all sessions. My main responsibility is to ensure safety and compliance with all sporting regulations, and to guarantee our competitors don't get an unfair advantage on us. I liaise with race control via a dedicated intercom channel if issues arise. It was a pretty smooth FP1 and I think the only time I had to communicate with the FIA was when Nico

12.45

### Free practice 1 driver debrief

"Both engineering teams go through what they did during the session and the drivers give their feedback. For me it's mostly just listening, but if I have any points to add from the session, I'll communicate them."

13.30

### First drivers' meeting

"This is the regular meeting between the drivers and the race director. There are two meetings scheduled: the first one is online, just after FP1, to go over matters

reported the fire on the side of the track at turn 7. I contacted the FIA sporting director Tim Malyon to make them aware. It's something I've never seen before."

relating to the current event.

"The in-person meeting in the press conference room is usually on Friday evening. If there's anything people want to discuss from previous events, they have to inform the race director. Nobody did this time – drivers are always happy to miss a briefing – so the second meeting was cancelled."

14.30

### Sprint qualifying meeting

15.30

### Sprint qualifying

"I think it went well. We exceeded our expectations a little bit with P12 and P13, which is good. There were no major incidents either. Kevin felt

**Crolla with Faith Attack-Martin, the Haas physiotherapist and performance coach, on Friday**

**FP1 in China went smoothly for the team and Crolla had only one brief chat with the FIA**

he was impeded by Lando Norris but the FIA looked at it and decided there was nothing to it. Carlos Sainz also felt he was blocked by our car and made a comment, but it didn't go any further."

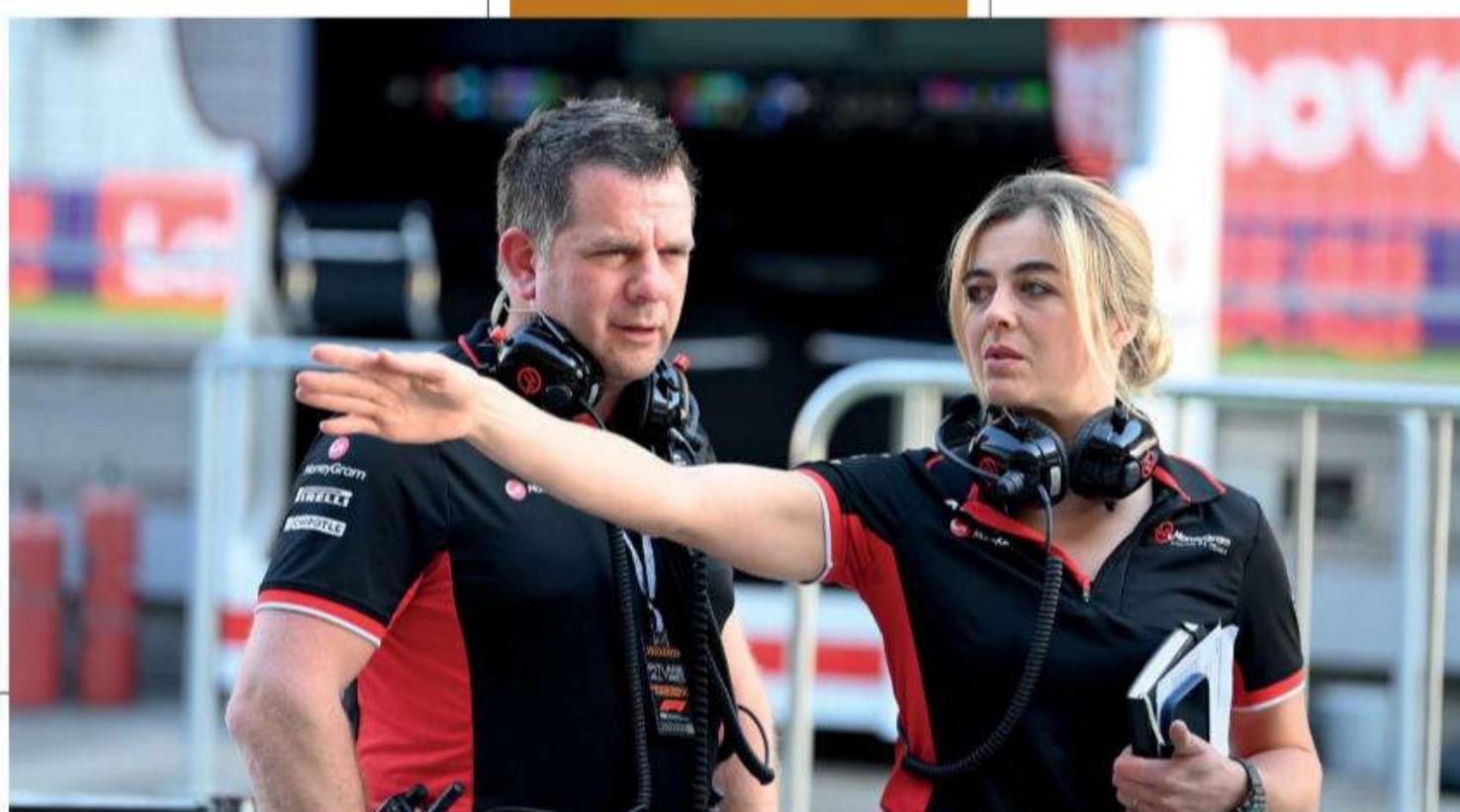
16.30

### Sprint qualifying: drivers' meeting

17.45

### 2nd sprint qualifying: drivers meeting: cancelled

"With the drivers' meeting cancelled and the cars in the parc fermé, we were done for the day at around 6.30pm."



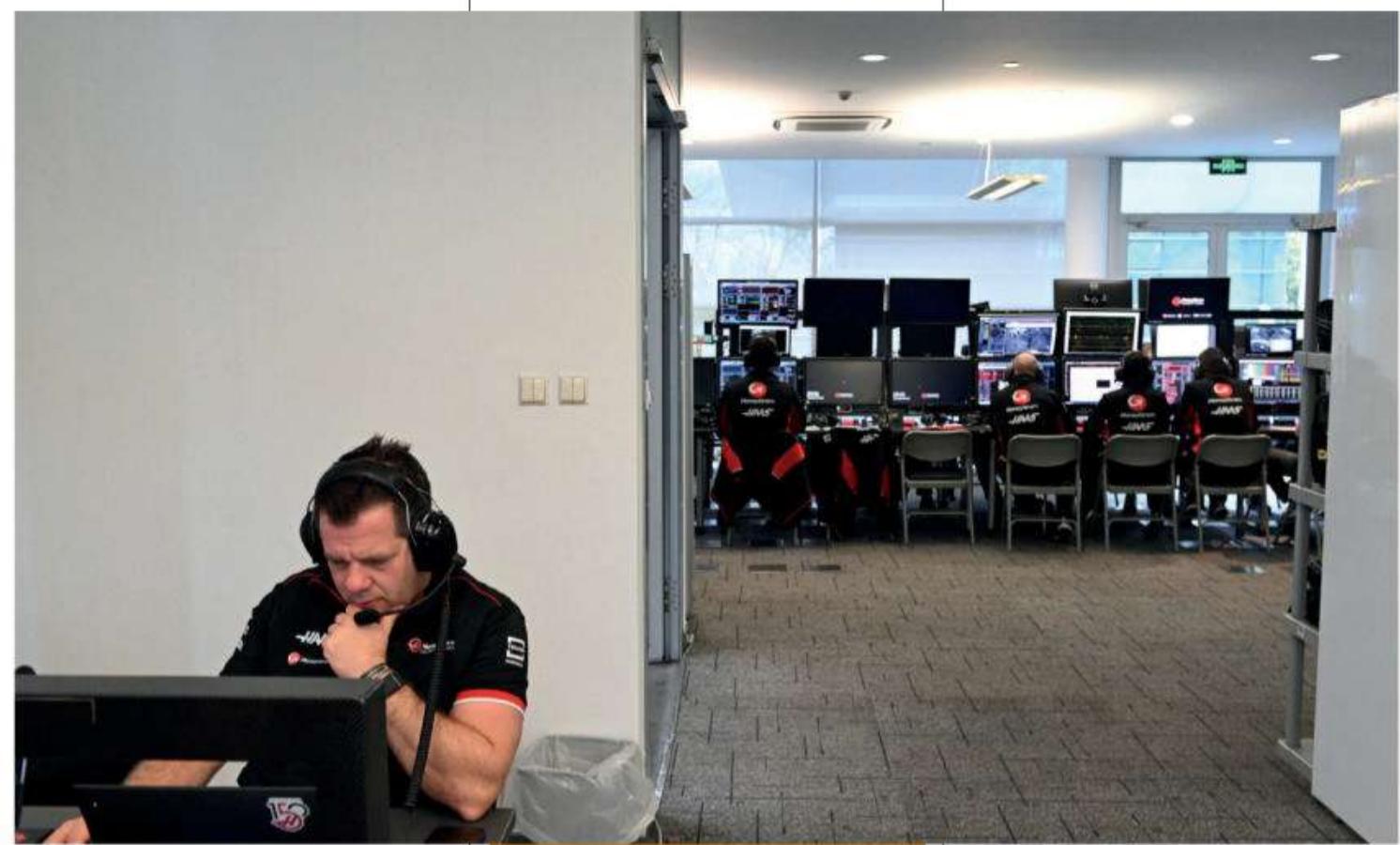
# SATURDAY: SPRINT RACE

09.00

## Pre-race briefing

“Here we talk about all the variables we anticipate for the sprint. It’s not a race with planned tyre changes but we treat it the same way in terms of the grid procedure and the crew being ready for a pitstop.

“Again, it’s an engineer-led meeting where they go through what they’re expecting from their respective cars. And then the strategy engineer will give us an overview of any potential variables.”



before the cars go to the grid and read these notes out on our race channel.

“Most things are similar for most races: we tell people where the gates are for the grid, remind everyone what our grid positions are, which garage we’re going to use if we have to retire a car – all relatively low-level stuff, but important.

“All these things have to be planned in advance. Because if you have a situation in the race, you need to apply it immediately.”

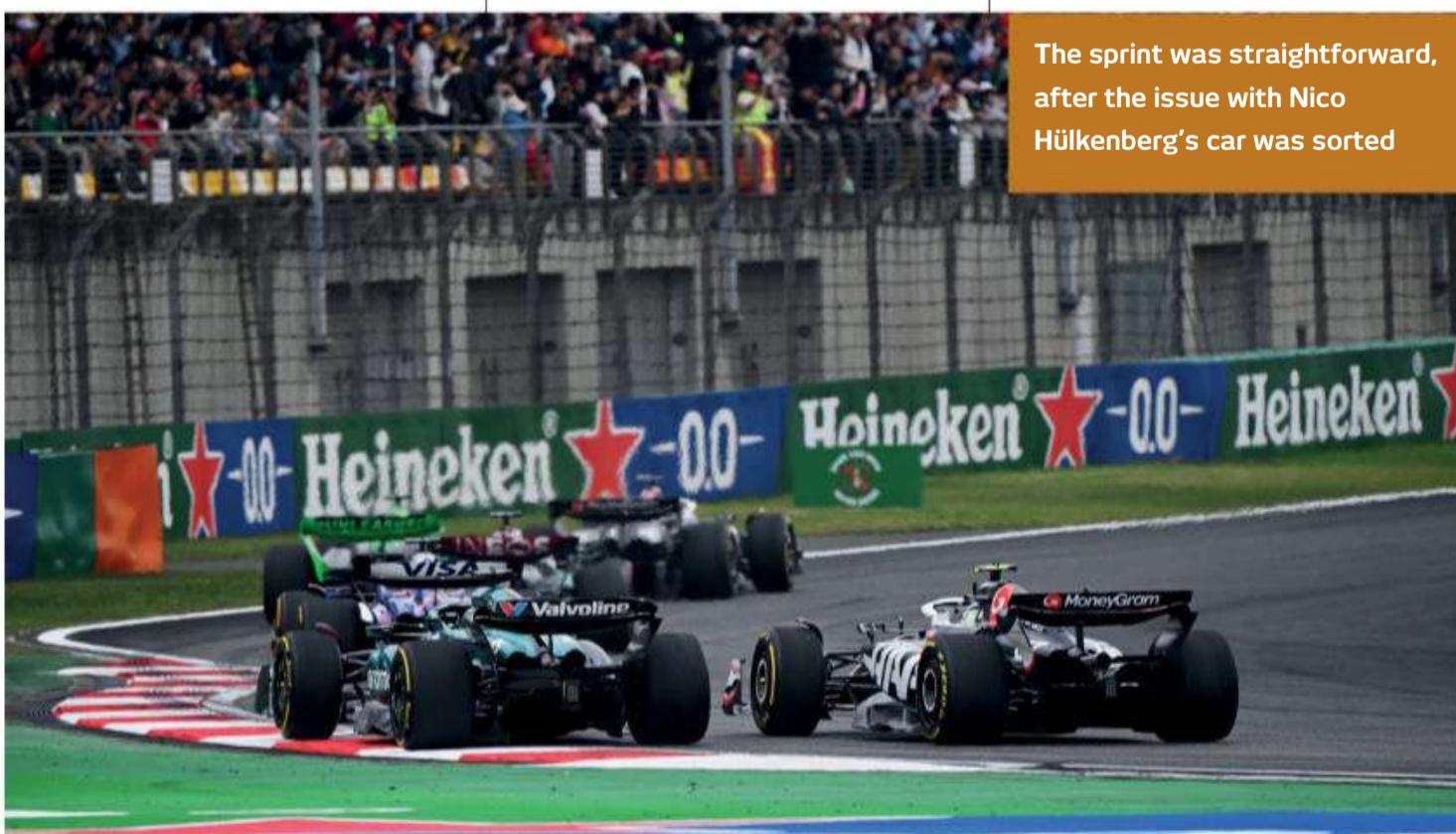
**Before the sprint race Crolla emails (and later reads out) any operational procedures**

10.30

## Pitlane open: sprint

“Before the race, I issue some notes – just giving the guys instructions on where to access the grid, reminding them of accreditation requirements, any operational procedures such as where the grid trolleys are stored when we come back, and making sure everyone’s ready for any pitstops, even if it’s a sprint. I email it, but I also read it to the team before we go to the grid.

“I get on the pitwall 20 minutes



**The sprint was straightforward, after the issue with Nico Hülkenberg’s car was sorted**

the three-minute mark.

“The race itself was quite procedural. No stops, no damage. Kevin was P10, Nico P19.”

12.15

## Sprint: drivers’ meeting

14.00

## Qualifying programme meeting

15.00

## Qualifying

“No big drama. Sainz’s crash brought out the red flag, but it didn’t really affect us. Kev was a bit unlucky and ended up in P17, but Nico went through to Q3, which was also a bit unexpected after a difficult sprint.”

16.15

## Qualifying: drivers’ meeting

17.30

## Pitstop practice 3: cancelled

“We schedule a pitstop practice on Saturday evening but often there isn’t enough time, which was the case this Saturday.”

# F1 UNCOVERED

## SUNDAY: GRAND PRIX

10.15

### Miami-Imola planning meeting

“A quick 15-minute chat between me, the chief mechanic, the chief garage technician and the race team coordinator about our plans for the time in the factory after Miami and before Imola – mainly discussing logistics.”

11.30

### Strategy meeting

“Led by the strategy engineer talking about our plans and predictions for the race, and how we’re going to run it in terms of pitstop calls.”

12.30

### Pre-race briefing

12.30-13.30

### Pit stop practice 4

“Final pitstop practice – two hours before the race, just to get everyone’s mind and body right. We did seven stops, all pretty straightforward, just replicating what most of our race stops can be: push the car in, change the tyres, adjust the front wing.”

14.20

### Pitlane open – race

“Again, I’d be on the pitwall about 20 minutes before pitlane opens – and our preparation is very similar to the sprint, with one of the biggest differences being that we’ve got a longer time the pitlane is open, so we usually do two or three reconnaissance laps to the grid.”

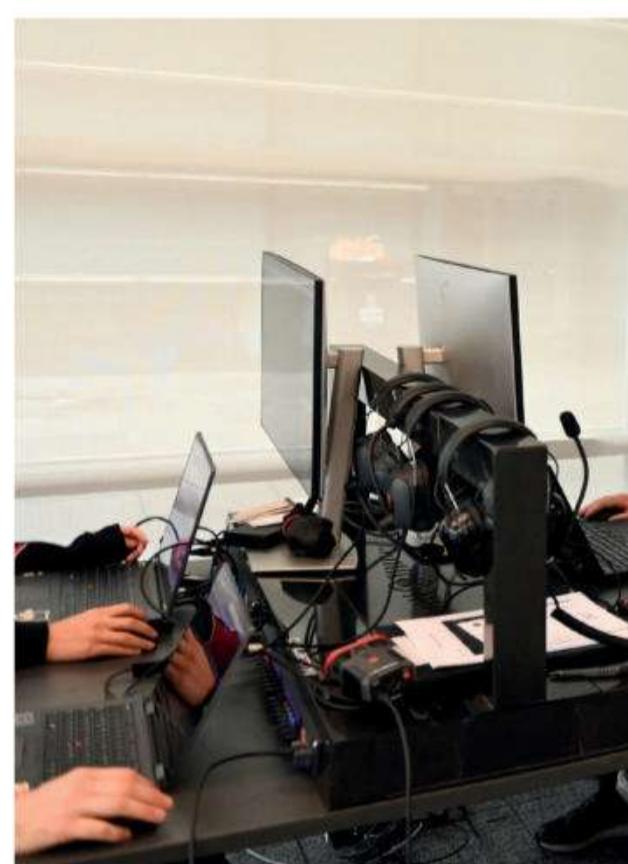
15.00

### Race

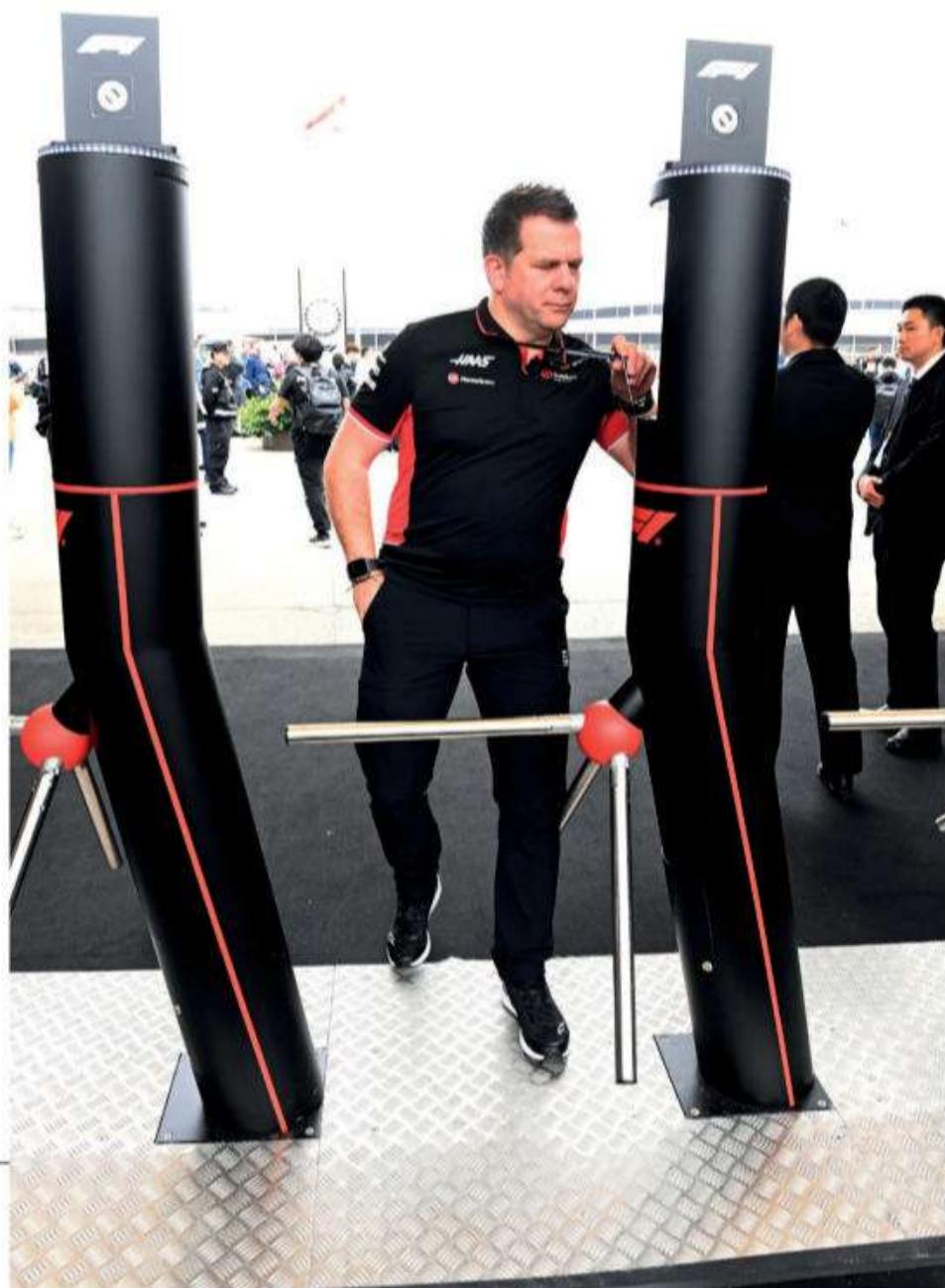
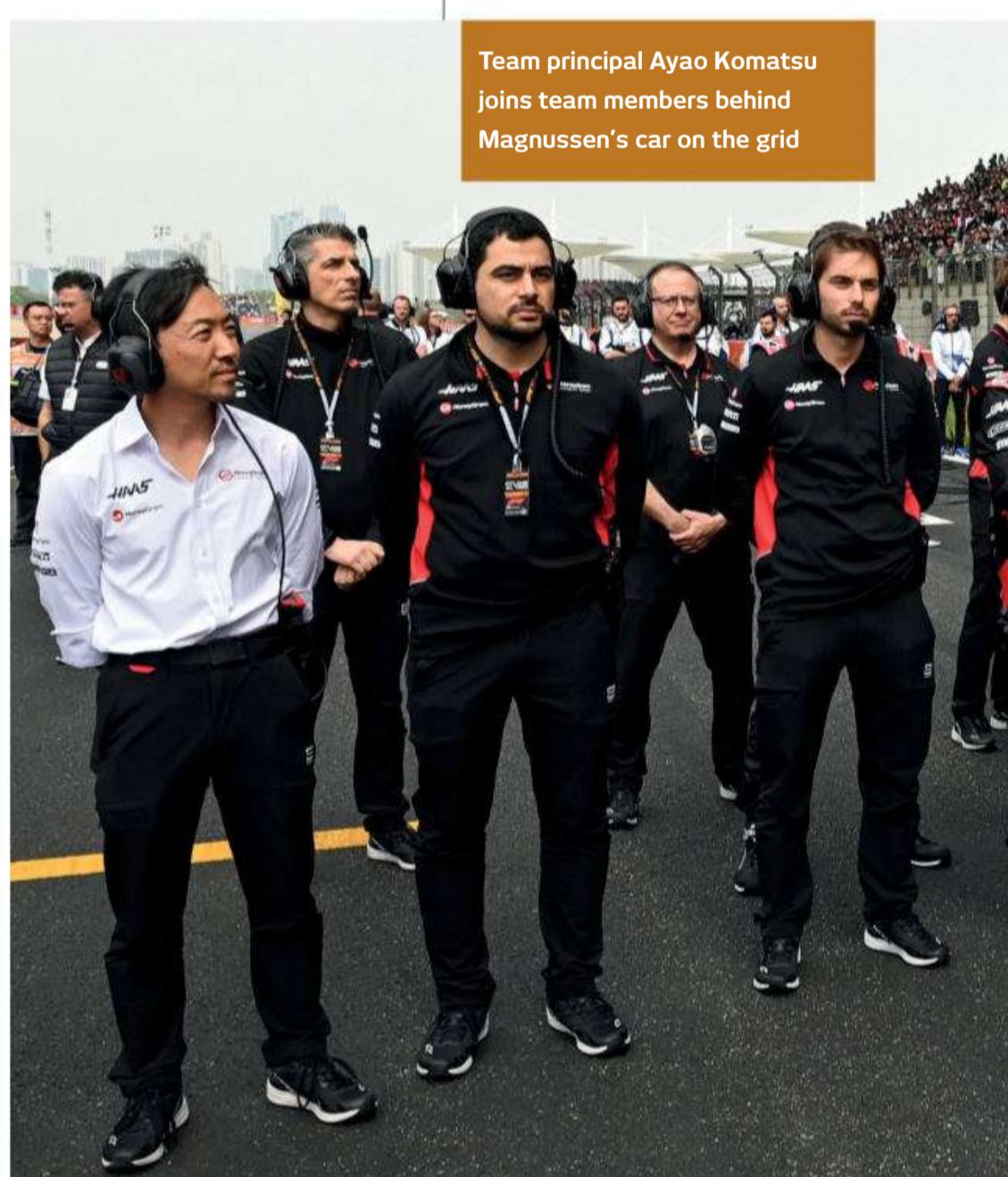
“Quite an eventful race – and in the end we managed to score a point

with Nico for P10, which was great. A little disappointing for Kevin: he was involved in an incident with Yuki Tsunoda, got a puncture and then a 10-second penalty which we can’t fight.

“There were a couple of other incidents that required us to communicate with the FIA. We made a stop under the Safety Car for Nico, knowing he’d be very close to Logan Sargeant at the pit exit. Our car crossed the Safety Car line just a few milliseconds earlier. We monitored that closely and since Logan stayed in front, we flagged it to race control, which resulted in a penalty for Williams. We had a similar penalty in Canada a couple of years ago, so since then we’ve been paying more attention to those kinds of things. It’s a shame for Logan because it was impossible for him to judge from the car – and his team didn’t spot it either. I was hoping he’d just be asked to give the place back, but that’s part of a wider discussion at the moment.”

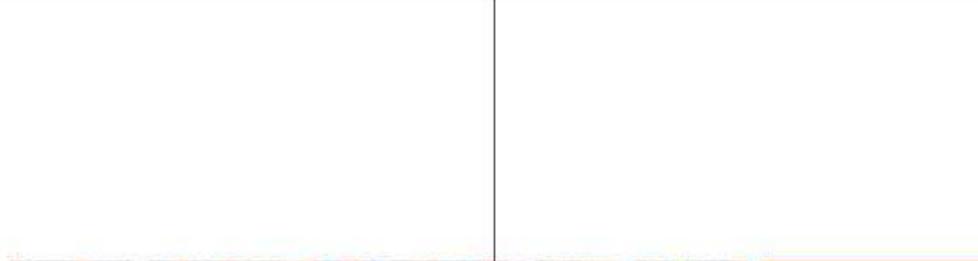


Team principal Ayao Komatsu joins team members behind Magnussen's car on the grid





Above: Crolla with Neil Hanley, race team coordinator, as they prepare for Sunday's race



Magnussen gets ready for the GP. After an eventful race a penalty dropped him to 16th



There were no grid dramas on race day for Hülkenberg and he came home with a point



17.00

Drivers' debrief

18.00

Stewards' hearing

"We were summoned for the incident involving Daniel Ricciardo. Nico overtook him and Lance Stroll when they crashed before the restart, which he was entitled to do since they'd 'slowed with an obvious problem'. Then we had another Safety Car right after and Ricciardo overtook Nico thinking he could regain his position.

"These meetings are usually very civilised. It was me, Nico and Marco Perrone from RB with Daniel. Our P10 was never in jeopardy."

22.30

Leaving the track

"Packing starts before the race is over – and after a few hours nearly every member of the team is involved. Airfreight was ready by 10."

# MAURICE HAMILTON'S ALTERNATIVE VIEW

Hang on tightly, let go lightly: ever the pragmatist, 1979 world champion Jody Scheckter is parting with his painstakingly acquired car collection rather than keeping it in a shed

PICTURES  
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FOR A WORLD CHAMPION WHO showed scant sentiment when he was racing, it was no surprise when Jody Scheckter walked away from the sport and completely disappeared twelve months after winning the title in 1979. That seemed in keeping with the surly South African. Jody went racing to do a job – and do it in spectacular fashion. But he had little time for the peripheries. And even less for the motorsport media.

In 1975, Scheckter was in his second full F1 season. The mood at Barcelona's Montjuïc Park that year was edgy following the discovery that barriers on the scarily fast street circuit had been put together in a haphazard fashion. Many bolts had not been tightened; some pieces of Armco had no bolts at all.

Having refused to take part in the first practice

session, most drivers had gathered in the Texaco trailer to discuss their next move. Naturally, the world's media was very keen to discover what that might be when Graham Hill, Niki Lauda, Emerson Fittipaldi and Scheckter gathered on the trailer's steps to address the crowd. Once he had outlined the drivers' thoughts, Hill faced a hail of shouted questions from below. I happened to be standing to one side, near the front, and distinctly heard Scheckter, after a couple of stroppy enquiries, mutter to the double world champion: "Just tell them to fuck off." At which point Jody did exactly that and disappeared back inside.

He mellowed considerably with the passing seasons, particularly – and surprisingly – during the pressure of his championship year and a happy partnership with Gilles Villeneuve.

Scheckter had gone to great lengths to gather the very cars that had been milestones in his racing career



The cars that represented the highlights of Jody's career, from a Formula Ford Merlyn to the title-winning Ferrari 312 T4, at Laverstoke Park ahead of their auction in Monaco

When Scheckter then moved to the United States to establish a highly successful firearms training company with an eventual 280 employees, F1 quickly became a distant memory. That continued to be the case when he later returned to the UK and ploughed the profits from the sale of his firearms operation into Laverstoke Park, a massive undertaking in Hampshire. Refusing, as ever, to do things by half, Jody became a world leader in organic, biodynamic farming. It was as far removed from motor sport as you could wish to be. And yet...

Stored wheel-to-wheel in an immaculate shed on the farm, Scheckter had gone to great lengths to gather the very cars that had been milestones in his racing career. There were 12 in total,



Even though it was early in his F1 career, Scheckter made his feelings known over media interest in what the drivers thought of the state of the Montjuïc Park barriers



In 2019 Scheckter and the Ferrari 312 T4 ran some demonstration laps at Monza, where he was joined by his former mechanics 40 years on from his title success

ranging from the humble Formula Ford Merlyn (#74) used to announce himself in a memorably sideways style during a support event for the Race of Champions at Brands Hatch in 1971 to the boat-like shape of the championship-winning Ferrari 312 T4.

In between, there was a fascinating collection of diverse machinery: the McLaren M21 (with which he had won the F2 race on the equally lovely Crystal Palace circuit in 1972); the Trojan T101 Formula A/F5000 car from the days when wannabe F1 drivers would sample other forms of racing rather than being tied to a mind-numbing 24-race F1 calendar; the Tyrrell P34 (#3) six-wheeler from the period when freedom of F1 design choice was not limited to drivers' tribute

crash helmets; and the gorgeous Wolf WR1 (#20) which won first time out in the 1977 Argentine GP (something that wouldn't be allowed to happen today because of the avaricious attitude shown towards newcomers by the current F1 teams, some of whom are incapable of producing enough cars for their own drivers to race.)

The entire Scheckter collection of cars is up for auction at around the time this issue of *GP Racing* reaches print. Having gone to enormous trouble to track down his racing hierarchy – and even allowing for the tidy total of bids conservatively estimated to reach £12m – it's quite some decision to have this moving museum of memorabilia split asunder. Equally, it wouldn't be surprising for the pragmatic Scheckter to see

the value in having such unique machinery put to good use rather than being crammed into a barn and away from the gaze of an appreciative public.

The front row of the auctioneer's delicious publicity photo is dominated by McLaren, but with the 312 T4 (#11) centre stage: an appropriate juxtaposition given the cover story of this issue of *GP Racing* and questions about where next for Ferrari.

Back in the day, the McLaren M23 was about to start a long and distinguished career, netting two world championships. The distinctive 312 T4, however, was coming to the end of an almost fleeting presence at the forefront of F1. Scheckter had made mixed use of both cars.

His GP debut had been in the bulbous McLaren M19 at Watkins Glen in 1972. The M23 (#8) was introduced in 1973, Peter Revson finishing fourth in Spain and Denny Hulme winning the M23's fifth race in Sweden before Scheckter stood in for Revson in France (the American driver having a McLaren Indycar commitment). Scheckter collided with Fittipaldi's Lotus while fighting for the lead. But that was a mere skirmish compared to what was about to unfold at Silverstone.

Powering through Woodcote (in its fast and former guise) at the end of the first lap, Scheckter lost control and triggered a massive pile-up. The M23 was surprisingly undamaged. The same could not be said for others, the carnage having wiped out all three cars belonging to the Surtees team.

Scheckter had calmed down considerably by the time he joined Ferrari in 1979. There was hardly a mark on the 312 T4 through 13 championship GPs, Jody winning three of them.

In 2019, he was reunited with the 312 T4 for demonstration laps at Monza, scene of his championship crowning 40 years before. His former mechanics had come out of retirement, specially to prepare the car. Their grins were broad as Jody urgently revved the glorious flat-12 and accelerated hard towards the Rettifilo chicane. Just as he had always done.

It's tempting to wonder if the same will happen to the Ferrari SF-24 in 40 years' time. And whether it will be considered worth listening to.



 **motorsport**  
IMAGES **SHOWCASE**

# FERNANDO ALONSO

With a new contract signed to the end of 2026, what better time to look at his long F1 career

When Fernando finished third in the 2005 Brazilian GP he became, at 24 years and 58 days old, F1's youngest world champion. Alonso claimed seven wins during the season and the title was secured with two races to spare



Alonso has always been a huge fan favourite and contributed to sell-out Spanish GPs for a number of years. The crowds made sure he knew of their adoration with huge, football-style, banners and Alonso's success led to a second GP in Spain, on the streets of Valencia, which ran from 2008 to 2012



Alonso won the 1999 Euro Open by Nissan series, and one of the benefits of this was a test in a more powerful car. That just happened to be a run in an F1 Minardi M01 at Jerez in December 1999. The team then opted to have Fernando as its test and reserve driver for 2000 while he competed in F3000



When Fernando moved to Ferrari for 2010 a third world title seemed inevitable and his career with the Scuderia couldn't have started better. Alonso qualified the Ferrari F10 third for the season-opener in Bahrain, behind the Red Bull of Sebastian Vettel and his own team-mate Felipe Massa, but quickly took second. When Vettel slowed with a spark plug issue Alonso moved into the lead and claimed his 22nd F1 win





**▲**  
In the 2003 Brazilian GP Alonso was running third when all hell broke loose. Mark Webber had crashed his Jaguar heavily on the pit straight and Fernando was unable to avoid a loose wheel. He hit the tyres on the left and spun across the track into the wall. The race was immediately red-flagged



**▲**  
Alonso impressed in his debut season at Minardi, in an uncompetitive car, but was only handed a test driver role with Renault for 2002. Renault team boss Flavio Briatore was also Alonso's manager, and Briatore wanted to keep Alonso in the Renault family rather than let him race with another team



**▲**  
After five wins in his first season at Ferrari, and narrowly being beaten to the title by Sebastian Vettel, Alonso went into 2011 in buoyant mood. Unfortunately the Ferrari F150° Italia was no match for the Red Bull RB7 and Fernando's only victory of the season came at the British GP



Alonso returned to F1 in 2021 to another of his old flames, the Enstone-based Alpine team. Fernando was consistently in the points during the season and then finished a stunning third in the Qatar GP, his first F1 podium in eight years



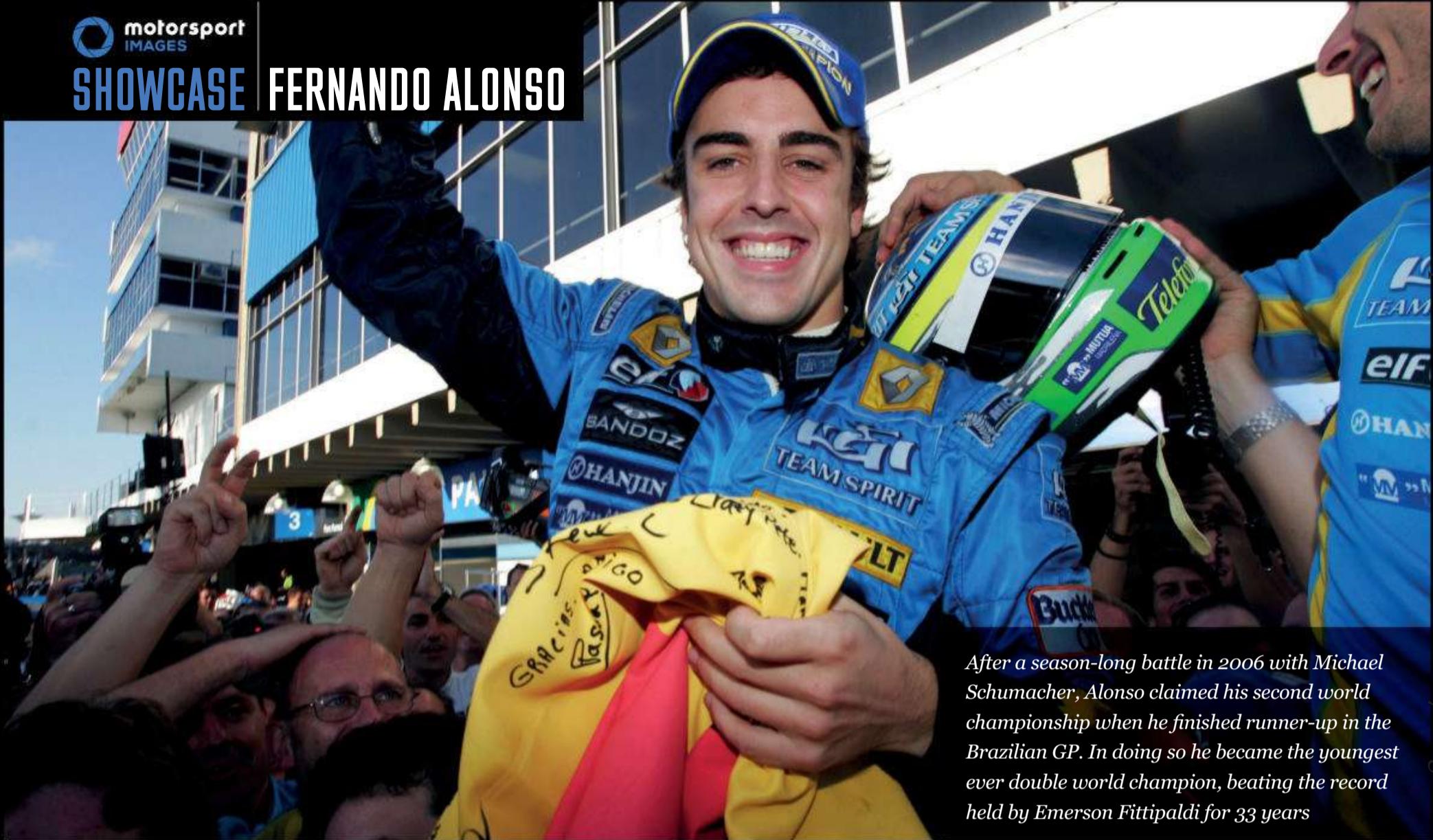
The simmering feud between Alonso and 2007 McLaren team-mate Lewis Hamilton boiled over in qualifying in Hungary. Alonso delayed Hamilton in the pits after the latter had disobeyed team orders that disadvantaged him



One of Fernando's luckiest escapes in F1 came at the 2012 Belgian GP. Romain Grosjean's Lotus (out of picture) hit the back of Alonso's Ferrari (facing the wrong way) and flew over it. Six years later, when Alonso was airborne in a McLaren at the same circuit and hit the top of Charles Leclerc's Sauber, the cars were all sporting halos

In 2005 Alonso gave an example of superb defensive driving at the San Marino GP. Michael Schumacher's Ferrari was on the tail of Alonso's race-leading Renault after rejoining from a pitstop on lap 50 but, despite fresher tyres, was unable to find a way past the dogged Alonso in the last 12 laps





After a season-long battle in 2006 with Michael Schumacher, Alonso claimed his second world championship when he finished runner-up in the Brazilian GP. In doing so he became the youngest ever double world champion, beating the record held by Emerson Fittipaldi for 33 years



Fernando and the Renault team celebrate winning the 2008 Singapore GP, when Alonso took advantage of a Safety Car after team-mate Nelson Piquet crashed. 'Crashgate' has created many column inches and its ripples are still being felt 16 years later, but it's worth noting, though, that Alonso also won the very next race in Japan



Alonso on the famous line of bricks that form the finish line at Indianapolis. It was obvious in 2017, three seasons into his second spell at McLaren, that the marriage wasn't working. So Alonso and McLaren CEO Zak Brown agreed that Fernando could miss the Monaco GP and race the Indy 500 instead. Driving an Andretti Autosport-entered Dallara Alonso led four times for a total of 27 laps before his engine failed



Aston Martin started 2023 with arguably the second-fastest car, behind Red Bull, and Alonso took full advantage of this. Fernando was third in the season opener in Bahrain, and followed that up with another third at the next race in Saudi Arabia. Including his 32 wins this was the Spaniard's 100th F1 podium – the first was at the 2003 Malaysian GP – and he managed another six during the rest of the 2023 season

ers/frank.foster/Desktop/Fernando Alonso showcase/2006 youngest double world/dogbra1691.

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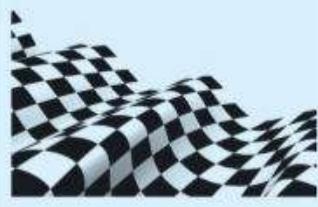
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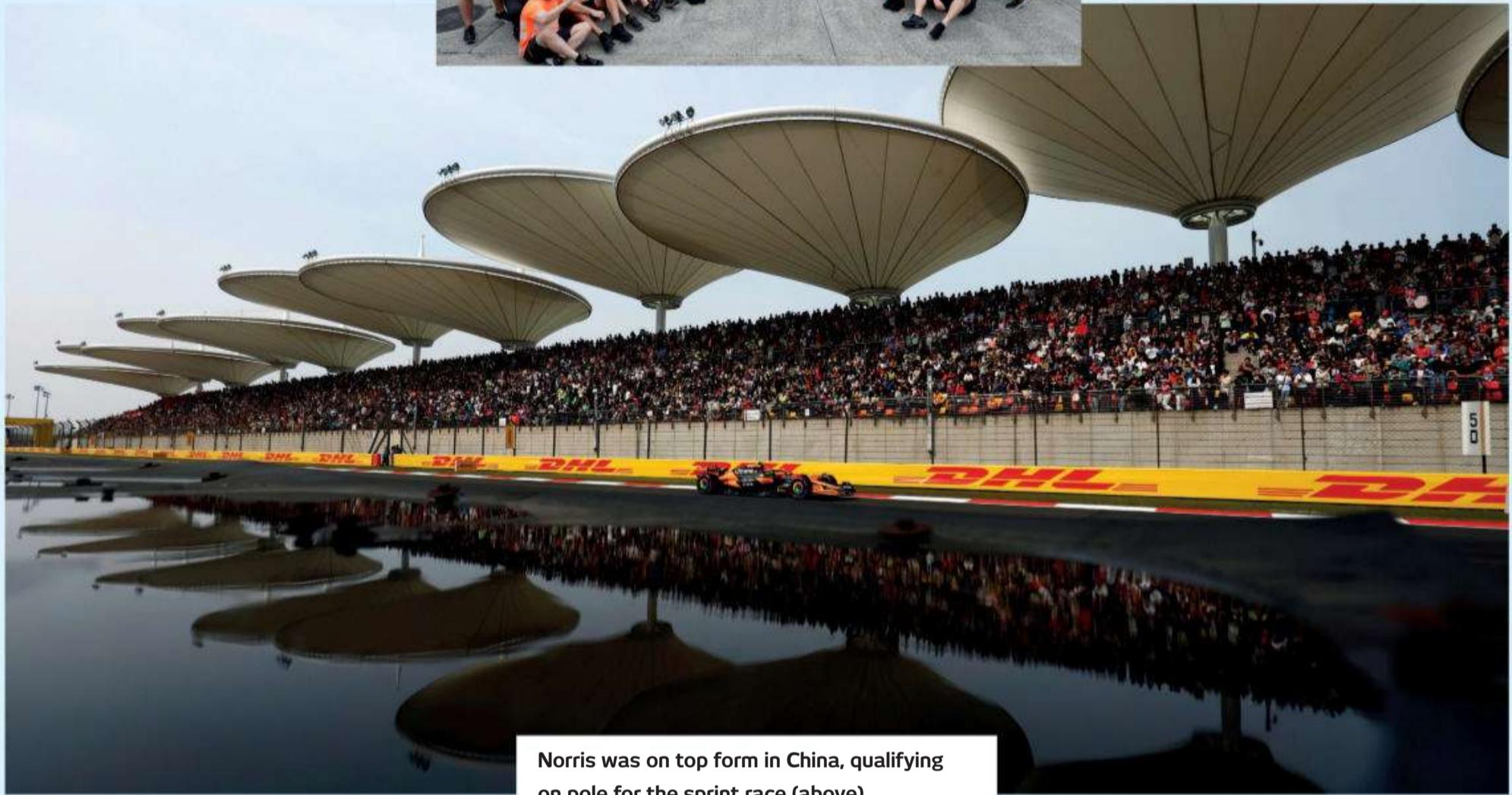
## RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 5

THE CHINESE GP  
IN 5 KEY MOMENTS

REPORT BY JAMES ROBERTS

**1** Norris overachieves behind imperious Verstappen



Norris was on top form in China, qualifying on pole for the sprint race (above)



Norris's lighthearted wager with engineer Will Joseph (above) was way wide of the mark



In an era dominated by one competitor, it's often easier – particularly for the mainstream media and braying 'influencers' among the internet natterati, all straining for a hot take – to focus on the negative and neglect some of the outstanding performances through the field. Max Verstappen was certainly operating in a different class in Shanghai, winning the sprint and Sunday's grand prix; he's now triumphed in 21 of the last 23 races and it's difficult to imagine him not steamrolling to a fourth world title.

But in Max's wheeltracks Lando Norris served up further confirmation that he has the hallmarks of top-tier grand prix driver. To both his and his team's surprise, Norris finished second to Max at a circuit that hasn't been kind to McLaren in recent years (on his last visit here, Lando qualified 15th and didn't make it to the finish).

Lando joked that he'd had a friendly wager with his engineer, Will Joseph, that he'd cross the line 35 seconds behind the Ferraris. The bet is typical of his tendency towards self-doubt, which is at odds with his obvious talent. While his finishing position owed much to excellent tyre management, he proved earlier in the weekend

he had one-lap pace too.

It started well for Norris in the new-look sprint weekend timetable under which sprint qualifying replaces FP2 on Friday afternoons. Rain here enabled F1's commercial rights holder to give itself a pat on the back: instead of a quiet practice session with hardly any cars on track, fans were treated to an eventful session in which Norris grabbed pole position.

Joining him on the front row was Lewis Hamilton but, at the snaking Turn 1 on the first lap, Lewis made the jump on his compatriot and gave the McLaren little choice but to run wide. Norris finished the sprint in sixth and then qualified fourth (in the dry) for the grand prix itself.

On Sunday, Lando inherited the lead on lap 14 when Verstappen pitted for the first of his two stops. The Red Bull man was back in front within five laps, but a Virtual Safety Car was deployed when Valtteri Bottas lost the power unit in the back of his Kick Sauber. That nearly derailed Norris's race but, in the end, it secured him second place.

When Bottas's car slewed to a halt, it was initially covered with double waved yellows before

PICTURES: STEVEN TEE; ZAK MAUGER; MARK SUTTON



The removal of Bottas's car (above) and Safety Car (below) set off the train of events that had Ricciardo fuming after the race



the VSC was triggered – by which time Norris had passed the pit entry. Behind, his nearest challenger Charles Leclerc took advantage of the VSC to make a 'cheap' pitstop. This would have been highly disadvantageous to Norris but the stricken car was stuck in second gear, frustrating the marshals' attempts to clear it out of the way. Norris was able to pit the following lap and not lose out to the Ferrari. Having managed their tyres well in extending their first stints, both Norris and Leclerc were now able to run to the end without stopping again.

Lando gained another benefit from the extended caution when the VSC was upgraded to a full Safety Car to cover the presence of an extraction vehicle on track. Red Bull decided to pit both its drivers again, causing Sergio Pérez, who had passed Lando to run second in the first stint, to fall behind Leclerc in a net fourth place. In the final stint, Checo took too much out of his tyres in labouring to clear Leclerc, finally making the pass

at Turn 6 on lap 39. At this stage Pérez was 5.5s behind Norris with 16 laps to go, but it was clear he didn't have the speed to close the gap and finished the race the same margin behind.

"We came here thinking it was a damage-limitation event," said McLaren's team principal Andrea Stella. "But F1 often surprises you..."

## 2 RB undone in nine corners

**The upgrading of the VSC** to a Safety Car on lap 24 for Bottas's broken machine triggered a downfall in the fortunes of the RB team. As the Safety Car peeled into the pits, leader Verstappen controlled the field on the approach to the hairpin, before accelerating away at the green flag.

Behind him, running in sixth, Fernando Alonso locked up approaching the hairpin and narrowly avoided hitting Carlos Sainz's Ferrari in front of him.

Four places further back, the second Aston Martin was seemingly blindsided by the queue of cars ahead of him – and ran straight into the back of Daniel Ricciardo. Lance Stroll hit the RB with such force it lifted the car off the ground and broke much of its floor. It also ran Ricciardo into the back of Oscar Piastri, causing diffuser damage which would compromise the remainder of his compatriot's race.

Stroll immediately pitted for a new front wing, while Ricciardo struggled on before retiring on

lap 33. After the race, Ricciardo admitted his "blood was boiling" when he heard Stroll wasn't prepared to admit responsibility for the shunt. Regardless of Lance's opinions, the stewards considered him bang to rights, handing him a 10s penalty.

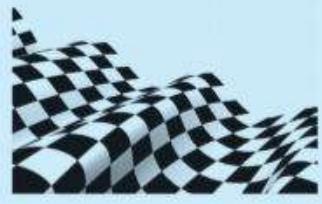
"Maybe in an hour, when he [Stroll] sees it, he might take some accountability. But if he doesn't, I can't help him," said Ricciardo. "It's so frustrating. Obviously, racing incidents happen, but behind a Safety Car, that should never happen. What made my blood boil is I watched his onboard, to see it from his perspective. As soon as we start braking, you can see his helmet turn right and he's looking at the apex of Turn 14 – he's not even watching me. When he looks back, he's in the back of me. I don't know what he's doing, where his head is, but all he has to do is worry about me in that situation."

"Apparently," continued Ricciardo, when he was apprised of Stroll's comments, "I'm an idiot, and it was my fault. I'm doing my best not to say what I want to say..."

Having called Ricciardo's mental acuity into question, Stroll continued his policy of declining to engage in self-criticism, saying the cars in front had slammed on their brakes and a "concertina effect" caused the incident.

When the pack reached Turn 6 on the following lap, Kevin Magnussen hit the right-rear of Yuki Tsunoda and broke his wheel, immediately putting the second RB out of the race – and leading to the redeployment of the Safety Car. It was a disastrous nine corners for RB and worse was to follow.

In a further blow to Ricciardo, he was hit with



FINISHING STRAIGHT

# RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 5

a three-place grid penalty for overtaking Nico Hülkenberg while the race continued behind the Safety Car. He'd been passed by the Haas when shunted into the air by Stroll and believed himself entitled to retake the position. Not so, said the stewards, who applied a 10s penalty which was converted, after Daniel's retirement, to a grid drop for Miami.

## 3 No ordinary Zhou

**Williams co-founder Sir Patrick Head** was an unexpected visitor to Shanghai and matters arising on Sunday led to recall of a discussion Sir Frank Williams once had about drivers picking up flags on the cool-down lap. Frank was fiercely patriotic but he didn't believe it was right for backmarkers to be too enthusiastic in their celebrations. What, then, would he have made of the special treatment Zhou Guanyu received when he was serenaded by the crowd at the end of the Chinese GP, having finished 14th?

Stake's drivers had looked strong before race

**Guanyu was, naturally, feted by the crowd and organisers all weekend long as the first Chinese driver to race in F1 on home soil**

day. Zhou had made Q3 in sprint qualifying, while team-mate Bottas started 10th on the grid for the main event. But despite the overwhelming support for the Shanghai-born racer – the first Chinese driver to compete in his home race – he wasn't able to convert that pace in the race. He even misjudged a pass on Kevin Magnussen on the penultimate lap, breaking his left-front-wing endplate in the process.

Zhou admitted he'd felt the pressure in the lead-up to this race and when he came to the grid on the final lap and stopped his car in front of a special board with his name on it, the emotion of the moment hit the 24-year old.

"As much as I want to treat this like a normal race weekend, when you see the crowd all packed into the grandstands and all cheering you on the grid... it gets me.

"I'm super proud and honoured to be the first Chinese driver to compete in the Chinese Grand Prix after 20 years. I'm emotional of course, it was a very special moment for me."

Let's hope the experiment of the local driver stopping on the grid at the end of the race doesn't become commonplace. Montréal might not quite be ready to rapturously applaud the only Canadian in the field...



**Ferrari duo Sainz and Leclerc were both unhappy with each other for specific incidents in China**

## 4 Ferrari's drivers flirt with the limits

**In China, Charles Leclerc** maintained his 2024 streak of not finishing lower than fourth. In contrast his team-mate Carlos Sainz ended his run of podium finishes (discounting the race in Jeddah he didn't start). Carlos is racing for his career and, as Andrew Benson documents this month (see p36), he has offers on the table and has had the edge over his team-mate until recently, since Charles has been struggling to get the best out of his car in qualifying.

But in China Leclerc fought back and their closely matched pace led to two subtle on-track skirmishes. Nothing alarming, but this is a rivalry on the simmer, ready to boil over...

During the sprint, Sainz had been robust with his defence of his team-mate at the Turn 14 hairpin, which Leclerc described as "over the limit."

Carlos apologised but Leclerc clearly hadn't forgotten the move when they approached each other at Turn 1 at the start of the grand prix. The pair were sixth and seventh on the grid but they both lost positions to George Russell's Mercedes and the Haas of Nico Hülkenberg around the spiral of Turns 1 and 2, as Leclerc understeered into his team-mate and took them both wide.

In the final classification, Leclerc finished 10 seconds ahead of Sainz. With the rest of the year for Carlos to prove his worth and no future at the Scuderia, this will be an intra-team duel worth keeping an eye on.





## 5 Alpine's wheel of misfortune

**It's only a small gain** but, for the first time this year, both Alpine cars finished the race on the lead lap. Yes, that was assisted by the deployment of the Safety Car, but it's a sign that incremental improvements on the car are slowly working. The Enstone team arrived in Shanghai with a new floor for Esteban Ocon (Pierre Gasly was due to receive the updates in Miami).

Ocon scored the team's best result – 11th – just

fractionally off its first points finish and behind another strong performance from Hülkenberg.

Gasly finished two places behind his team-mate in 13th but was initially delayed after an incident during his first pitstop on lap 12. Gasly was given the green light to leave before the right-rear wheel was securely on, though he reacted quickly to brake again when the light went red. The jolt forward knocked a mechanic over, but thankfully he was unhurt.

Despite the better weekend on-track, Alpine left Shanghai with a bank balance that wasn't quite so healthy. The FIA penalised the team €10,000 (£8,600) for the pitstop incident.

**Shanghai was an improvement of sorts for Alpine as both its cars reached the chequered flag on the same lap as the leaders**



## RESULTS ROUND 5

SHANGHAI / 22.04.24 / 56 LAPS



1st	Max Verstappen	Red Bull	1h40m52.554s
2nd	Lando Norris	McLaren	+13.773s
3rd	Sergio Pérez	Red Bull	+19.160s
4th	Charles Leclerc	Ferrari	+23.623s
5th	Carlos Sainz	Ferrari	+33.983s
6th	George Russell	Mercedes	+38.724s
7th	Fernando Alonso	Aston Martin	+43.414s
8th	Oscar Piastri	McLaren	+56.198s
9th	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	+57.986s
10th	Nico Hülkenberg	Haas	+60.476s
11th	Esteban Ocon	Alpine	+62.812s
12th	Alex Albon	Williams	+65.506s
13th	Pierre Gasly	Alpine	+69.223s
14th	Zhou Guanyu	Stake	+71.689s
15th	Lance Stroll	Aston Martin	+82.786s
16th	Kevin Magnussen	Haas	+87.533s*
17th	Logan Sargeant	Williams	+95.110s**

\*includes 10s penalty for causing a collision \*\*includes 10s penalty for overtaking under Safety Car conditions

### Retirements

Daniel Ricciardo	RB	33 laps/accident damage
Yuki Tsunoda	RB	26 laps/accident damage
Valtteri Bottas	Stake	19 laps/power unit

### Fastest lap

Fernando Alonso 1m37.810s on lap 45

### F1 Sprint – 19 laps

1st	Verstappen	2nd	Hamilton	3rd	Pérez
4th	Leclerc	5th	Sainz	6th	Norris
7th	Piastri	8th	Russell		

### TYRE COMPOUNDS USED



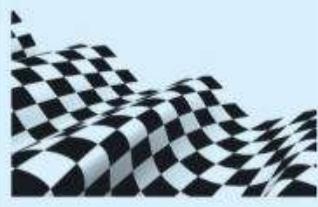
Hard (C2) Medium (C3) Soft (C4) Inter Wet

CLIMATE	AIR TEMP	TRACK TEMP
Overcast	22°C	30°C

### DRIVERS' STANDINGS

1 Verstappen	110pts	11 Tsunoda	7pts
2 Pérez	85pts	12 Bearman	6pts
3 Leclerc	76pts	13 Hülkenberg	4pts
4 Sainz	69pts	14 Magnussen	1pt
5 Norris	58pts	15 Albon	0pts
6 Piastri	38pts	16 Ocon	0pts
7 Russell	33pts	17 Guanyu	0pts
8 Alonso	31pts	18 Ricciardo	0pts
9 Hamilton	19pts	19 Gasly	0pts
10 Stroll	9pts	20 Bottas	0pts
11 Sargeant		21 Sargeant	0pts

 motorsport  
STATS



FINISHING STRAIGHT

# RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 6

## THE MIAMI GP IN 5 KEY MOMENTS

REPORT BY JAMES ROBERTS

1

### Safety Car timing just one factor in Norris's breakthrough win

**Lando Norris arrived in sunny** South Florida with a cut on his nose, the legacy of excess exuberance on a trip to Amsterdam to celebrate King's Day on a river boat with his DJ chum Martin Garrix. Come Sunday he'd rubbed shoulders with a former US President and won his first grand prix at the 110th time of asking. It had been quite a week for the 24-year old. And in anticipation of the partying that would follow on the Sunday evening of the Miami GP, Norris joked: "I might have more than a scratch on my nose tomorrow..."

No one could begrudge the McLaren man his long-overdue success. It was a mark of his popularity that so many rivals came to congratulate Lando on his triumph. In the post-race press conference, his friend Max Verstappen appeared happier than he does when he has won himself – such was the infectious joy surrounding the British driver. But victory looked far from assured on the opening lap of the race.

Norris qualified fifth on the grid at the temporary course which loops around the Miami Dolphins' home, the Hard Rock Stadium – but dropped back a place as he avoided an entanglement at Turn 1. Regarding the scene ahead of him at the end of

that opening lap – Max Verstappen in his customary lead, Charles Leclerc being challenged by the other McLaren of Oscar Piastri for second, followed by Carlos Sainz and Sergio Pérez – Norris prudently concluded his best option was to look after his tyres and see what unfolded up front. He noted his team-mate passing Leclerc on lap 17 and banked the knowledge that, on this day, a McLaren had the speed to get by a Ferrari.

By this point fifth-placed Pérez had slipped back to the point that he was proving an impediment to Lando's onward progress, a situation remedied

when Red Bull brought the Mexican in to change from medium Pirellis to hards. At this venue, where the temporary surface is slippery off-line, track position is king – and so, with all the frontrunners on a one-stop medium-hard strategy, and leader Verstappen already grumbling on the radio about balance and poor rear grip, McLaren now suggested to Lando that Pérez was no longer much of a factor and Norris should close up on Sainz.

That early phase of tyre management was rewarded when Norris inherited the lead on lap 28 as Sainz headed for the pits. One lap later the Safety Car was scrambled, Kevin Magnussen having nerfed Logan Sargeant into the wall, and this proved decisive in affording Norris a 'free' pitstop – even though Lando had passed the pit entry when the call came. Fortunately for him, everyone has to drive to a delta time in the interim between Safety Car conditions being called and the vehicle itself joining the track, so Lando's advantage was preserved and he could pit while retaining the lead.

In fact, Safety Car driver Bernd Maylander picked up Verstappen rather than the actual leader (Max himself would mirror this unintentional repetition of the usual status quo later, when he accidentally



**The crucial pitstop (above) that allowed Norris to retain his lead. His first win naturally went down well with his McLaren colleagues**





**Verstappen's race could have been ended at Turn 1 on the opening lap when locked-up team-mate Pérez almost took him out...**

sat in the winner's chair for the post-race press conference). The rest of the field therefore had to be waved by to avoid Norris gaining a lap.

From there it was a case of defending from Verstappen when the race restarted, which Lando accomplished – just – before quickly breaking out of DRS range and stretching away to lead by 7.6s at the chequered flag. Here he was assisted by Max's usually brisk car being compromised by floor damage (the result of a brush with Pérez at Turn 1, followed by running over a bollard at the chicane) and sub-optimal balance on much-older hard tyres.

"We were pulling away [in the first stint], but not like it should be," said Max, who went on to describe the second phase of his race on the hard-compound tyres as "quite a disaster", with uncertain balance in low-speed corners and prodigious understeer in the high-speed stuff.

Beyond the Safety Car timing and fortuitous Red Bull weakness, Lando also derived some benefit from having the full roster of McLaren's latest upgrades on his MCL38 – including a new front wing, front suspension, floor body, sidepod inlet, engine cover and cooling louvres – while Piastri ran with the old floor and sidepods. While it's difficult to quantify the success of the package in terms of lap time at this unusual circuit, the additional downforce enabled McLaren to place less demand on the rear wing, lowering drag. Team principal Andrea Stella suggested that the performance gains found through low-speed areas was more a factor of tailoring the setup to suit those corners rather than any particular characteristic of the new

parts. We will learn more in the races to come.

Still, Lando had shown a strong pace in sprint qualifying on Friday, setting the fastest time in SQ1 and SQ2. He drove maturely to establish advantages he maximised when the Safety Car unexpectedly handed him an advantage. While Norris acknowledged "it would have been tough" to overtake his team-mate, two Ferraris and a Red Bull without the neutralisation, this was indubitably a victory earned and not delivered on a silver platter.

A non-Red Bull winner and feelgood maiden win was the perfect fillip for the new – and potentially fickle – US fans, let alone longtime fans feeling the creeping ennui associated with one-car dominance.

mate Pérez heading into Turn 1 at the start. This area of the track proved to be the focus of incident throughout the weekend.

Given the temporary nature of this track, the lack of grip off-line into the tight right-hander at T1 can cause problems as drivers understeer under braking. In the sprint on Saturday, Lewis Hamilton escaped sanction for his role in the incident which eliminated Lando Norris from the race. Naturally this caused some agitation among the commentariat – but the stewards' explanation was that the Aston Martins of Lance Stroll and Fernando Alonso had already made contact with each other before the "sudden and fast arrival" of Hamilton up the inside "contributed to the various collisions". Norris became collateral damage, suffering a right-rear puncture and spinning as Stroll was pushed into him. While the stewards said "we were not able to identify one or more drivers wholly or predominantly to blame for the various collisions or any one of them", they were unimpressed by Norris crossing the track on foot, and fined him €50,000 (half of it suspended for 12 months on the proviso the misdemeanour is not repeated).

Come the main event, it was crucial the Ferraris got the jump on Verstappen at the start. Charles Leclerc had failed in the sprint and, as it transpired, he was tardy off the line on Sunday and was leapfrogged by team-mate Carlos Sainz. Then suddenly Sergio Pérez arrived at Turn 1 on the inside at full pelt. He locked up his brakes, nearly took out his own team-mate (evidenced by a scratch discovered on Max's diffuser post-race),

## 2 Turn 1 is the trouble magnet

**Max Verstappen has made no secret** of not being a huge fan of the Miami International Autodrome. A weekend of hot temperatures, and a slippery surface that's constantly evolving, makes it difficult to get tyres into the perfect operating window. This year Max was never happy with the balance of his Red Bull, expressed surprise he had the pace for pole and, during the latter stages of the 57-lap grand prix, he was complaining that he couldn't get his Red Bull to rotate into the corners.

The fact Verstappen was still circulating at the end of the race was nothing short of a miracle, since he was oh-so-nearly collected by his team-



FINISHING STRAIGHT

# RACE DEBRIEF

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 6



**Magnussen will have to be very careful after picking up more penalty points in Miami, with a ban looming if he incurs any extra ones**

and forced Sainz into an evasive action which allowed Leclerc back into second and Oscar Piastri to take an opportunistic third. Pérez resumed and blocked Norris as he came back onto the circuit.

"Offline there was no grip and I ended up locking," said Checho, as if he was surprised by the absence of something that hadn't been there all weekend.

## 3 Magnussen facing ban

**With the F1 paddock located** on the football field of Hard Rock Stadium, there is a genial atmosphere at the Miami Grand Prix, but the ever-cheerful Haas team manager Peter Crolla (see p74) had more of a furrowed brow than usual when GP Racing bumped into him on Sunday morning.

Crolla had been to see the stewards for a lengthy hearing with Kevin Magnussen following a series of time penalties dished out in the sprint which had warranted a summons for unsportsmanlike behaviour. K-Mag had run off the track three times while fighting to keep Hamilton behind him – and in so doing enabled enough of a gap to emerge in

the 19-lap race for his team-mate Nico Hülkenberg to score two points for seventh place. It escaped nobody's notice that, as Nico waltzed away, the battle between Magnussen and Hamilton was joined by seven other cars... with predictably messy results as they scrapped amongst themselves.

Kevin picked up three 10 and one five-second penalty for exceeding track limits. Afterwards he said: "I started using these stupid tactics, which I don't like doing. But I did my job as a team player. Nico scored points because I got that gap for him."

While the stewards ultimately didn't find Magnussen guilty of unsportsmanlike behaviour, the fact he was able to build up successive penalties and not serve them until after the flag means they do not have the same detrimental impact, as per the old ruling in which a penalty has to be served within three laps. It's a point the stewards have acknowledged they will raise with the FIA.

Moreover, Magnussen had now picked up eight penalty points in a 12-month period – and earned two more when he hit Logan Sargeant in Sunday's race, along with a 20s penalty for pitting under the Safety Car without changing tyres (the penalty is based on presumed disruption to other cars). Two more and Haas will be needing another driver...

## 4

### Frustration for Sainz

**While the timing of the Safety Car** undoubtedly helped Norris to victory, Carlos Sainz felt somewhat robbed – had he pitted a lap later, it might have been he who stood atop the podium. It's those fine margins that can frustrate a driver and in the final classification Sainz was fifth, picking up a post-race time penalty for contact with Oscar Piastri which broke the McLaren's front wing.

The Safety Car period left Sainz in a net fifth behind Piastri and, on lap 39, after being rebuffed on several previous occasions, he launched up the inside of Turn 17. As he turned in, the back end of the Ferrari stepped out and the side-on contact sheared off the left-hand side of Piastri's front wing from the tip of the nose to the endplate.

Piastri dropped to last after pitting for repairs and, in his haste to reclaim lost ground, was reminded that Lando was leading and the last thing the team wanted was another Safety Car...

"I'm frustrated with the start, frustrated [with the Safety Car], frustrated with Oscar because he ran us off track and we had contact," said Sainz. "If we could have extended for one more lap we could have won like Lando did. Today was his day, while looking at my race I would say the opposite..."

## 5

### A better weekend for embattled RB

**While there was much fanfare** for Lando Norris's Miami GP win, on the previous day there was equally good cheer for Daniel Ricciardo's return to form in the sprint race. The Australian qualified fourth and made a decent start to run third early





on. He repelled Sergio Pérez until lap five, and then did a great job to keep Carlos Sainz behind him.

He was unfortunate to carry over his three-place grid penalty from China for the main race and didn't make a whole deal of progress from last position. "It shows just as quickly as you can have a good race, you can have a bad race," said Ricciardo. "I know what I can do, but I still have to look at myself and take some accountability. At this level you have to be perfect and, when you are, things can look pretty spectacular. I still leave here very

**Sainz felt he could have won the race if he had pitted a lap later, but ended up not even on the podium in fifth position**

happy – happy and proud."

In a further sign the RB is working well, the team left Florida with a good haul of points, thanks to Yuki Tsunoda's eighth and seventh in the two races. He has reached Q3 in four of the last six races and is now 10th in the standings.

**Ricciardo (left) was overjoyed by his performance in the sprint race. Sainz and Piastri (below) eventually tangled on lap 39**



## RESULTS ROUND 6

MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AUTODROME / 05.05.24 / 57 LAPS



1st	<b>Lando Norris</b>	McLaren	1h30m49.876s
2nd	<b>Max Verstappen</b>	Red Bull	+7.612s
3rd	<b>Charles Leclerc</b>	Ferrari	+9.920s
4th	<b>Sergio Pérez</b>	Red Bull	+14.650s
5th	<b>Carlos Sainz</b>	Ferrari	+16.407s*
6th	<b>Lewis Hamilton</b>	Mercedes	+16.585s
7th	<b>Yuki Tsunoda</b>	RB	+26.185s
8th	<b>George Russell</b>	Mercedes	+34.789s
9th	<b>Fernando Alonso</b>	Aston Martin	+37.107s
10th	<b>Esteban Ocon</b>	Alpine	+39.746s
11th	<b>Nico Hülkenberg</b>	Haas	+40.789s
12th	<b>Pierre Gasly</b>	Alpine	+44.958s
13th	<b>Oscar Piastri</b>	McLaren	+49.756s
14th	<b>Zhou Guanyu</b>	Stake	+49.979s
15th	<b>Daniel Ricciardo</b>	RB	+50.956s
16th	<b>Valtteri Bottas</b>	Stake	+52.356s
17th	<b>Lance Stroll</b>	Aston Martin	+55.173s**
18th	<b>Alex Albon</b>	Williams	+76.091s
19th	<b>Kevin Magnussen</b>	Haas	+84.683s***

\*includes 5s penalty for causing a collision \*\*includes 10s penalty for leaving the track and driving-through penalty  
gaining an advantage \*\*\* includes 10s penalty for causing a collision and drive-through penalty converted to 20s time penalty for entering pits during a Safety Car period and not changing tyres

### Retirements

<b>Logan Sargeant</b>	Williams	27 laps/accident
-----------------------	----------	------------------

### Fastest lap

Oscar Piastri 1m30.364s on lap 43

### F1 Sprint – 19 laps

1st	Verstappen	2nd	Leclerc	3rd	Pérez
4th	Ricciardo	5th	Sainz	6th	Piastri
7th	Hülkenberg	8th	Tsunoda		

### TYRE COMPOUNDS USED



CLIMATE      AIR TEMP      TRACK TEMP

Sunny	22°C	30°C
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### DRIVERS' STANDINGS

1	Verstappen	136pts	11	Stroll	9pts
2	Pérez	103pts	12	Bearman	6pts
3	Leclerc	98pts	13	Hülkenberg	6pts
4	Norris	83pts	14	Ricciardo	5pts
5	Sainz	83pts	15	Ocon	1pt
6	Piastri	41pts	16	Magnussen	1pt
7	Russell	37pts	17	Albon	0pts
8	Alonso	33pts	18	Guanyu	0pts
9	Hamilton	27pts	19	Gasly	0pts
10	Tsunoda	14pts	20	Bottas	0pts
	<b>motorsport STATS</b>		21	Sargeant	0pts



FINISHING STRAIGHT

## RACE PREVIEW

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 7

## EMILIA ROMAGNA GP

17-19 May 2024  
Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari

PICTURE: STEVE ETHERINGTON ILLUSTRATION: ALAN ELDRIDGE



## THE MAIN EVENT

**Imola** has a long motor racing history even though the track by this quaint town didn't host a world championship grand prix until 1980, when it stood in for Monza as host of the Italian GP. There was a short-lived plan to alternate between the two venues, in a similar fashion to Silverstone and Brands Hatch's coexistence as British GP hosts. Imola got the nod after a 1979 non-championship event but politics intervened and the national race reverted to Monza – although Imola hosted a race, named after the nearby principality of San Marino, until 2006.

In the grand European tradition, the track can trace its origins back to public roads. The narrow, undulating layout has little in common with the so-called 'Tilkedromes' prevalent in newer territories.

## 2022 RACE RECAP

This was the first round of the season to feature a sprint and it also set a new record for the number of red flags in qualifying – five in all. While Charles Leclerc nipped ahead of polesitter Max Verstappen in the sprint, the Ferrari began to chew up its rear tyres and Max prevailed in the end. Second for Leclerc was a double whammy because it left him on the right-hand side of the grid for the GP, which proved disadvantageous in the wet conditions on race day.

The majority of drivers on the right duly got wheelspin at the start, including Leclerc, who dropped behind Sergio Pérez and Lando Norris. Verstappen led every lap and set the fastest lap, claiming his second career grand chelem. Pérez and Norris completed the podium.

## KEY CORNER: TURN 2

The infamous Tamburello is now a chicane. It's tricky to judge right, given the slightly curving approach – especially in the poor weather which dominated the last running of the event in 2022.



## THE PAST FIVE WINNERS HERE...



2022

Max  
Verstappen  
Red Bull

2021

Max  
Verstappen  
Red Bull

2020

Lewis  
Hamilton  
Mercedes

2006

Michael  
Schumacher  
Ferrari

2005

Fernando  
Alonso  
Renault

## RACE DATA

## Circuit name

Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari

## First grand prix 1980

## Number of laps 63

## Circuit length 3.050 miles

## Race distance 192.033 miles

## Lap record 1m15.484s

Lewis Hamilton (2020)

## F1 races held 30

## Winners from pole 10

## Pirelli compounds C3, C4, C5

## CAR PERFORMANCE

## Downforce level Medium

## Cooling requirement Medium

## Full throttle 70%

## Top speed 207mph

## Average speed 129mph

## TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 17 May

Practice 1 12:30-13:30

Practice 2 16:00-17:00

Saturday 18 May

Practice 3 11:30-12:00

Practice 3 15:00-16:00

Sunday 19 May

Race 14.00

Live coverage Sky Sports F1

Highlights Channel 4

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FINISHING STRAIGHT

## RACE PREVIEW

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 8

## MONACO GP

24-26 May 2024  
Circuit de Monaco, Monte Carlo

PICTURE: GLENN DUNBAR. ILLUSTRATION: ALAN ELDRIDGE



## THE MAIN EVENT

**Formula 1's glorious outlier**, the race where overtaking is virtually impossible – and yet, despite the occasional moan, the drivers love the Monaco experience. For them it's a full-on assault on the senses, a merciless exercise in high-speed precision where the slightest mistake is punished.

Even drivers of the quality of Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc have come a cropper, misjudging their attack at the exit of the swimming pool section and clipping the apex barrier. Leclerc's shunt in 2021 came after he'd set a time quick enough for pole position and, in its eagerness to avoid a grid penalty for working on the car in parc fermé conditions, Ferrari failed to spot a cracked driveshaft which failed as Charles drove to the grid on race day.

With new 'glam' races arriving on the calendar, there was talk that Monaco's time as the jewel in F1's crown was over – not so, as it signed a new three-year deal in late 2022.

## 2023 RACE RECAP

Mercedes moved away from its 'zeropod' concept, as the W14 appeared for the first time with conventional sidepods, but the team remained a bit-part player as Max Verstappen dominated qualifying. Max's team-mate Sergio Pérez had another nightmare weekend, starting last after being eliminated in Q1. The evergreen Fernando Alonso put in a mighty qualifying lap to start second.

Rain wrought chaos late in the race as several teams and drivers misjudged the onset and intensity of the deluge. Alonso held his nerve to finish second behind Verstappen, while Esteban Ocon was third for Alpine.

## KEY CORNER: TURN 15

The right-hander after the swimming pool is where it all goes wrong for some drivers. A hard clip of the barrier can be a suspension breaker or push the car into the Armco on the exit of Turn 16.



## THE PAST FIVE WINNERS HERE

2023	2022	2021	2019	2018
Max Verstappen Red Bull	Sergio Pérez Red Bull	Max Verstappen Red Bull	Lewis Hamilton Mercedes	Daniel Ricciardo Red Bull



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FINISHING STRAIGHT

# RACE PREVIEW

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 9

# CANADIAN GP

7-9 June 2024  
Circuit de Gilles Villeneuve

PICTURE: ANDY HONE, ILLUSTRATION: ALAN ELDIDGE



## THE MAIN EVENT

**Mosport Park**, deep in the countryside east of Toronto, was the first home of the Canadian GP (though the earliest races to carry that name were sportscar events) but in the 1970s the cars outgrew the track. Their performance had already gone beyond what could be considered safe at the alternative venue, Mont-Tremblant in Quebec.

The solution lay 80-odd miles to the south of Mont-Tremblant in Quebec's most populous city, Montréal, on an artificial island built to celebrate Canada's centennial during Expo 67. The site had subsequently been repurposed to host the rowing events in the 1976 Olympics. Formula 1 arrived in 1978 and, barring the occasional failure to agree terms with Bernie Ecclestone, has remained a fixture on the calendar thereafter.

It's a tricky track, like a street circuit without the buildings. The stop-start layout puts a premium on power, traction and braking capacity.

## 2023 RACE RECAP

Although Max Verstappen qualified on pole and led from lights to flag, having rebuffed a first-corner challenge from the fast-starting Lewis Hamilton, it was an action-packed race in his wake. Nico Hülkenberg managed to qualify fifth for Haas but went backwards as the race progressed, while Hamilton and his old nemesis Fernando Alonso disputed second place.

Alexander Albon won the 'Driver of the Day' award for his tenacious defence of seventh, rebuffing a string of faster cars in his Williams.

## KEY CORNER: TURN 9

While Turn 14, bounded by the infamous 'Wall of Champions', draws most attention, peril also lurks at the exit of this fast corner where George Russell deranged his front wing last year.



## THE PAST FIVE WINNERS HERE



2023  
Max  
Verstappen  
Red Bull



2022  
Max  
Verstappen  
Red Bull



2019  
Lewis  
Hamilton  
Mercedes



2018  
Sebastian  
Vettel  
Ferrari



2017  
Lewis  
Hamilton  
Mercedes

## RACE DATA

**Circuit** Circuit de Gilles Villeneuve

**First GP** 1978

**Number of laps** 70

**Circuit length** 2.709 miles

**Race distance** 189.685 miles

**Lap record** 1m13.078s

Valtteri Bottas (2019)

**F1 races held** 42

**Winners from pole** 21

**Pirelli compounds** C3, C4, C5

## CAR PERFORMANCE

**Downforce level** Medium

**Cooling requirement** Medium

**Full throttle** 67%

**Top speed** 217mph

**Average speed** 132mph

## TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

**Friday** 7 June

**Practice 1** 18:30-19:30

**Practice 2** 22:00-23:00

**Saturday** 8 June

**Practice 3** 17:30-18:30

**Qualifying** 21:00-22:00

**Sunday** 9 June

**Race** 19:00

**Live coverage** Sky Sports F1

**Highlights** Channel 4



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## GEAR UP

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### PRIVATE MONACO

**Author** James Patterson and Adam Hamdy

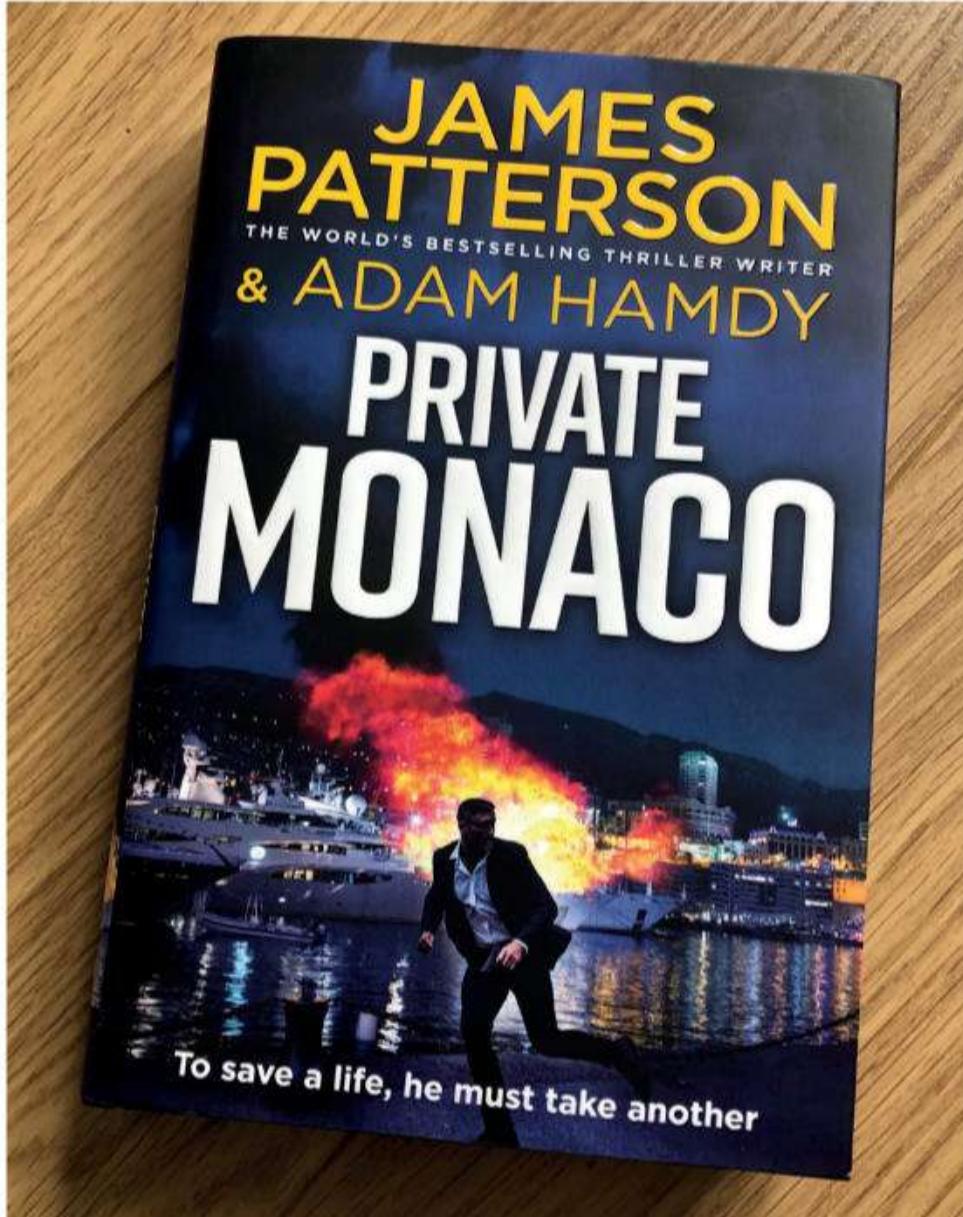
**Price** £20

[penguin.co.uk](http://penguin.co.uk)

**Though crime and motor** racing often go hand in hand, as a rule GP Racing doesn't rate any of the thrillers set in the world of motor sport. But only a fool would bet against the literary juggernaut that is James Patterson, and *Private Monaco* isn't specifically set in the motoring milieu; in this latest entry in the long-running *Private* series, detective agency boss Jack Morgan and his wife Justine

are planning a little continental R&R, including a trip to the Monaco Grand Prix, when nefarious forces intervene.

So there are no thinly veiled Ecclestone-alikes on the cast list and no tedious screeds of technical exposition. It's a precision-tooled page-turner which seamlessly moves through the gears at pace in everyone's favourite sunny place for shady people.



### ORIENT MAKO 20TH ANNIVERSARY

**Price** £424.99

[orientwatch.co.uk](http://orientwatch.co.uk)

**To celebrate the** Mako's 20th anniversary Orient has launched a new collector's edition diver-style watch limited to 3000 pieces. Featuring engraved dolphin images on the caseback and a blue graduated tint across a stamped wave pattern on the dial, this timepiece is conceived to evoke the oceans surrounding Japan. Arabic numerals and a two-tone

blue and black aluminium plate on the unidirectional rotating bezel are signature Mako design features, while this special edition adds 20th anniversary lettering at four o'clock. Gold-coloured hands complete the celebratory effect.

An automatic F6922 movement claims accuracy of +25 seconds to -15 seconds per day, along with a power reserve of 40 hours.

## EVO RACING 32R LEATHER

Price €269.99

[guillemot.com](http://guillemot.com)

**Just as growing computing** power has blurred the edges of gaming and simulation, so too have the accoutrements necessary to play or drive. As one of the principal contact points, the steering wheel is among the most important elements of any home gaming/sim rig. Thrustmaster's latest contribution to the genre is the EVO Racing 32R Leather steering wheel, an add-on rim compatible with all the company's force-feedback racing wheel bases. Based around a detachable hub which can be combined with rims and paddles of

different shapes and sizes ("available at a later date" says Thrustmaster), the EVO range will enable users to swap between different genres of car – for instance, between the round wheels seen in touring and rally cars and the more esoteric shapes found in single-seaters.

The 32R Leather weighs 1300g and is 32cm in diameter. The leather rim features kryptonite yellow stitching, 25 action buttons in total (functionality depends on computing platform), and long, curved paddle shifters with magnetic actuation.



## SPINNAKER BRADNER GMT AUTOMATIC

Price £490

[spinnaker-watches.com](http://spinnaker-watches.com)

**Those who travel** for business will appreciate the latest addition to Spinnaker's Bradner collection, which promises to enable wearers to effortlessly keep track of three time zones simultaneously. This, of course, will mean no excuses for being late or 'accidentally' missing tedious Zoom meetings while in the field.

Stainless steel construction with a bead-style bracelet melds resilience with comfort, while the anti-reflective sapphire lens maintains clarity in all conditions. The see-through caseback affords a view of the automatic GMT movement within. An alternative rubber strap comes with the package.





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## IT'S TIME FOR NICO TO RUN RINGS

By the time the 2024 season is out, Nico Hülkenberg should be on 227 Formula 1 race starts. Now that he's set to move to Sauber for next year ahead of its Audi rebrand, he's on course for 300 – give or take the cash-squeezing whims of the Liberty Media-era calendar.

Just 18 months on from his career resurrection with Haas, this is a remarkable turnaround for a driver who had been staring into the F1 abyss with his 2019 Renault exit – and all the TV punditry that dark, soulless chasm offers an ex-racer who can string a chippy sentence together. But Hülk's story is far more inspiring than semi-regularly broadsiding his former rivals from the sidelines.

He never gave up. When Racing Point came calling twice in 2020 due to the Covid-19-enforced absences of Sergio Pérez and Lance Stroll, he was superb. Things were trickier when he made another substitute appearance for Sebastian Vettel



**Hülkenberg's move to Sauber next season, ahead of the Audi rebrand, will see the German return to the operation he raced for in 2013**

for the same reason at 2022's commencement. Yet his Aston Martin reserve deal kept him paddock-bound and from there, through an impressively relentless campaign into Guenther Steiner's phone when Mick Schumacher couldn't stop crashing that year, he earned another shot.

Haas needed secure, experienced hands – and Hülkenberg delivered. But it was how he shone

even around the team's shocking in-race 2023 tyre-wear issues that made him stand out. His qualifying exploits, plus his race to seventh in Australia, had Haas activating his 2024 option much sooner than many expected. It has been suggested the Melbourne drive was enough to seal the deal. And that proved important given Audi was soon circling and Nico, understandably, reciprocated the interest.

In joining Audi, for Hülkenberg it rights a wrong from a bygone age. Where, although he refuses to name the team involved, he was passed over for a shot at the big time because he was deemed too tall just when weight rules of the burgeoning turbo hybrid era meant an awfully unhealthy focus on driver size. This was 2013, when his impressive first season for Sauber was considered an audition for a move to its engine partner, Ferrari.

But by this point another major part of F1's technical rules were staining what had been a stunning junior CV. F1's uber-fragile Pirelli

tyre era was unfurling and Hülkenberg, for all his speed, could never get a handle on them in the way his generational peers – say, Sergio Pérez – could. Let alone the racer leading the way at the time: Lewis Hamilton.

While the ground-effect cars and the post-2016 tyre strengthening mean the rubber-whispering challenge is less extreme, it still defines F1 success. And so, it says much about the gaggle of similarly rated drivers Hülkenberg regularly races that he got the Audi nod – a shot with much of the prestige he missed a decade ago. At least his path out of Haas actually enhances the chances of highly rated youngster Ollie Bearman getting an opportunity, embedded as he already is with the American squad.

Audi wanted a German driver to start its first F1 era and that meant Hülkenberg stood out. But his infamous lack of F1 silverware means this is, to many, an uninspiring choice. Once again, he provides security to a project that cannot afford high-profile mistakes and means a reunion with his 2015 Le Mans-winning boss, Andreas Seidl. And so, does this herald the Audi era? That the relentless logic will trump potentially bolder choices? It won't matter if it wins – something Mercedes and Honda took time to achieve and Toyota never did, the contrasting manufacturer stories Ingolstadt must heed.

**IT SAYS MUCH ABOUT THE GAGGLE OF SIMILARLY RATED DRIVERS HÜLKENGEBERG REGULARLY RACES THAT HE GOT THE AUDI NOD**

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